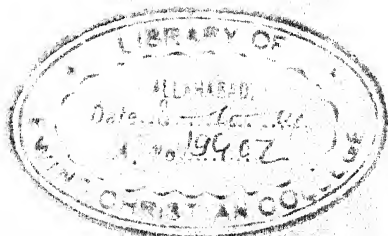


THE SOUL OF ST. PAUL

By

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I.—THE CONVERSION OF ST. PAUL

“ Suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven.”
—ACTS ix., 3.

This is the story of a religious conversion, of a critical and determining experience in the history of a soul. Nothing interests men more than such histories. All the narratives that have deeply affected mankind have turned upon some crisis in spiritual fortunes. The interest of the crisis may have lain in tracing the chain of outward circumstances which prepared or seemed to prepare it. Or it may on the other hand have lain solely in a close scrutiny of the gradual and hardly perceptible inner movements which led to that moment big with change and renewal. But without that moment the story would have been hardly a human story at all. So naturally do we look for the great transforming moment in a life which is to satisfy us of its real humanity. So little can we accept as really human the life which unconsciously and without an effort accepts itself, which has never needed to challenge itself and to wring from itself the satisfying and renewing answer to its own insistent questioning.

It is this moment of self-challenge which is really the conversion of a soul. There the life comes to itself, or at the very least wants to come to itself, feels that there is

a self after which it must seek, which will not simply come to it without seeking, that there is a self which it must make, which will not fall to it ready-made. This conversion is a universal human experience, or at the least a universal human need. But we have confused ourselves by confining the term to a particular kind of religious experience which is by no means common to all men, or even possible for all men, which is indeed, and perhaps fortunately, possible only for a few exceptional natures. And it is just this kind of conversion which is very often least worthy of the name. It is the effect of a momentary and superficial emotion induced by passing influences, and induced most readily in the most superficial natures. It is true that the appeals which produce such an emotion may sometimes find their way into the deep and silent nature and there leave the permanent lesson which will continue to do its work while life endures. But they are too often addressed to all that is most obviously of the surface stuff of feeling. Too often they are so ignorant of the nature of the will in us and of the means of stirring it into action that it seems almost an accident if occasionally they do reach it.

Now the nature of our mistake is clear enough. The secret of conversion lies in the character to which the appeal is addressed, and not in some conventional type of religious appeal. It is the inner history that matters. And nothing is of such slow growth as the trouble of the heart, the dissatisfaction with self. To force it is almost certainly to mar its efficaciousness, to rob it of its true value. Appeals from without may awake it into activity for the first time, or they may bring it to a head and give it complete consciousness of itself. But it is in its slow

working that the Spirit of God is wrestling with a soul. It is not in the message of a moment, but in the gradual lesson of an obscure and laborious effort, that the Divine Spirit comes to us. We disjoin in our thoughts, in our customary attitude towards religious things, experiences which grow confusedly together in our life. Rest is not an assured and final victory over unrest, nor is deliverance a definite escape from painful struggle with inveterate foes, nor is peace an absolute cessation of the soul's warfare. Much less can we achieve rest and deliverance and peace in some magical moment of the soul's awakening. No, all these things grow with and out of the soul's own growth. They well up like healing waters out of the apparently arid soil through which the soul struggles to come to itself. They are flashes across the darkness from the soul's own sword-play which illuminate and guide it in its conflict. Rest is just in the joyous strength of the unresting soul, and deliverance in the unyielding purpose that will not be enslaved, and peace in the courageous self-possession of the soul that has grown to be at home in its own warfare. These things are the evidences of God in our bruised and broken hearts, the Divine accompaniment and pledge of the renewal of a right spirit within us. They are no gifts of a magical moment, but gains of a slow and patient alliance with God.

And yet that moment will not be denied its place in the spiritual life. It appears and reappears in the history of the great souls. And here to-day the story of St. Paul brings us face to face with it once more. We cannot evade its challenge. And if we tried to do so, we should be missing one of the most illuminating lessons in

the records of the religious life. For in these few sentences is concentrated a great part of the history of a soul. We see in a flash the inner turmoil which has been labouring to come to complete consciousness of itself. We see it, not only as it saw itself in that moment, but as it had been through all its long confused working to that hour of insight and final resolve. We see back to the days of youth and of passionate devotion to the religion of the fathers of Israel. We see the young student in the lecture hall of Gamaliel with all his originality and force pledged to a punctilious study of the Law. And how living that Law must have been to him, alive with great memories and great hopes. Round it centred all the traditions of his race, and of its secular devotion to Jehovah. In it the living voice of God came to him, the voice of election which had called Israel from among the Gentiles and chosen him for its own, the voice of judgment which had driven the backsliding fathers into exile, the voice of inspiration which had nerved the avenging arm of the Maccabees, the voice of awful righteousness which had inspired the Pharisees to a meticulous obedience. But as the years passed on his own soul became gradually disengaged by its mere originality from the soul of his people. It became aware of its own burdens, of its vast dissatisfaction with itself, of a something wanting in the measure of its obedience. Yet there was no way of salvation but still greater strictness with self, still more ardent personal devotion to the Law, still greater earnestness in enforcing it upon a blind and easy-going populace, still fiercer zeal in resisting every heretical revolt from its Divine orthodoxy. In such a mood perhaps he witnessed to the

inexorable claims of the Law by taking part in the punishment of Stephen, and heard his dying words, and saw the glory on the face of the first martyr of Christ.

May we not believe that the trouble of his soul was deepened by the haunting memory of that glory? Here, outside the Law, defying the strictness of its claims, were a confidence, a joy, a victorious hope, which the most scrupulous obedience to it had never been able to yield him. Might it not be after all that this new way of which men spoke was the true salvation, that Jesus was the risen and victorious Messiah for whom Israel longed? From the haunting of that strange impossible hope, a hope which by its doctrine of the Cross flouted the tradition of the Fathers at its tenderest point, he could only escape by killing it outright, by hardening himself into a determination to hunt it down implacably and relentlessly, both in his own soul and in the world without. It is just so that we so often seek to escape from some new truth which we fear the more that it has attracted ourselves, and threatens our loyalty to the old familiar truth which has lost real inner hold over us.

And so the zealot of the Law, all the more a zealot because it can no longer satisfy him, is on his way to persecute the truth for which his soul is longing. There is something terrifying and terribly pathetic in the tumult of a soul which draws near the accomplishment of such an infamy, the infamy of a loyalty which is the supreme disloyalty. It was in the exhaustion of such a tumult that the lightning which rent the Syrian sky rent also once and for all the heart of St. Paul, and revealed to him the very face of the Saviour for whom he longed. It was through the thunder of the sudden midday storm

that the authentic voice of Jesus reached him at last. How often he had heard it since that day of Stephen's death, only to put it away from him as an impossible delusion. Now through the tumult without and within it strikes quite clear and definite. "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?" That was the very question which had haunted him, ever since in an act of fierce determination he had sought out the high priests and obtained their warrant and ridden forthwith through the Damascus gate. And the whole drama of hesitation repeats itself again in a flash in his soul. "Who art thou?" "I am Jesus, whom thou persecutest!" "What wouldst thou have me to do?" But at last there is peace, deliverance from the conflict of the past, an end to that stage of the conflict. The soul blinded with excess of light has found its true Master and yields itself henceforth to His direction.

Yet are we to think that that was an end to the history of conflict in the soul of St. Paul? No, it was only the beginning of a new stage of conflict. He entered upon it at once, as every great soul is driven to do, in the desert, in the deliberate exposure of the self in its silence and solitude to the judgment of God, in the deliberate measurement of the self, apart from the confident noise and bustle of the human world, against the new mission which it had realised as its own. St. Paul, too, the Spirit drove into the wilderness. And the problem which faced him there was the problem which all men have to face who have passed through the great change. It was the problem of helping the new life to grow out of the old, of transforming the old so that it might become the nourishment and support of the new. There is no

break in life for the soul that sees things as they are. There is only renewal. Indeed, it is a constant belief of such souls that they are going back to what is really old, that they are finding the purpose of God in its oldest and simplest form. So Luther went back behind the schoolmen to Augustine and St. Paul. So the reformers of to-day think they are going back to the simplicity of the Gospels. So St. Paul went back behind Moses and the Law to the Divine promises made to Abraham. Such beliefs are no doubt partly an illusion. The new is really new. It comes in a form which this earth has never known before. But they are also profoundly real and true. The new may be new, but it is not of God except it can find and prove its roots in that unchanging purpose and will of God which has been from the beginning, except it can show that it is bringing that purpose to a further fruition. And that is a task which tries the temper of the soul as nothing else can. It means making a new world of thought and of spiritual order out of a solitary faith in God in face of a hostile world rooted in its own narrower faith and strong in the tradition which has made that faith a great social and secular fact. It is no wonder if the strongest souls have sometimes quailed before the terrible claims of such a task, if they have always accomplished it in blood and tears. Athanasius against the world, Luther doubting whether after all he alone could be right and the whole Catholic world wrong—these are the historic symbols of the agony of that heroic witness to the new vision. And it is not only without but within that that witness makes its constraining claim upon the soul. There above all what one does depends entirely upon what one is. There the

inner purification may never cease. St. Paul knew the full stress of that high but relentless necessity to the end. "I keep under my body and bring it into subjection lest that, by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway."

This is the message of St. Paul's conversion to us. There is, there ought to be, for all of us some moment of self-challenge and self-knowledge, some moment when out of the drift of circumstance we recover our very selves and face life in the Divine measure of its greatness. It is a moment of the will's choice, and the will counts its moments in its own way. It may recognise its choice in some sudden flash of self-revelation, or it may grow into it imperceptibly by the consistent set of its own nature. But until that choice has been made and felt, however dimly, we are not really men, we are not really sons of God responding to the stress of the Divine grace within us. And in any case that moment of the will is no magical moment of deliverance from spiritual danger, of rest from spiritual toil. It is only the moment of high alliance with the Spirit of God, the moment that imposes sterner tasks and exposes to the malignity of fiercer foes in proportion to the strength with which it has knit the soul.

II.—REVOLUTION AND EVOLUTION

“ For the promise that he should be the heir of the world was not to Abraham or to his seed through the law, but through the righteousness of faith.”—ROMANS iv., 13.

The character of St. Paul, the most impressive in the long history of Christendom, is blended of an extraordinary and instinctive courage and of an equally extraordinary and instinctive caution. I call them both instinctive because, like all men who are really great, St. Paul had never realised his own character by way of analysis. For men of his moral magnitude it is impossible as it is unnecessary to place themselves under the microscope. It is not that they are not aware of their own force. It is indeed only such men who realise what human force can be. But they realise it as something concrete and almost impersonal, as a power they are permitted to use or more accurately which uses them with a masterful constraint and authority. When they analyse themselves at all, it is only to distinguish this power which possesses them and which they are too humble to claim as their own from the self of which it has come to take possession. Their self-analysis has a religious purpose and a religious bearing. It is the justification of God to which their own experience of this saving power impels them. In it they have no thought, almost no consciousness, of themselves. He alone lives in them and in their realisation of themselves.

None the less we from the outside can see something

of the make-up of such men's characters. And various as they undoubtedly are, there is something distinctly typical of them all in the blend of courage and caution which forms the character of St. Paul. The renewers of religion are almost always men of this stamp. In their present the future is always happily wedded to the past. They announce the future with the boldness of those who see it face to face. And yet they honour the past with the faithfulness of those who cherish it in their very blood. For most of us the past and the future face each other in unreconciled and irreconcilable hostility. For them the problem of reconciling them hardly exists. They themselves are the reconciliation. In them the past and the future have kissed each other.

Let us look at the case of St. Paul. It is impossible surely to over-estimate the revolutionary character of his religious position. When he speaks of the Law he does not mean merely the abstract code of Jewish tradition. He means all that is most concrete in that tradition. He means all that made it a religion, all the established usage of worship and belief. He means all that the temple sacrifices and the synagogic teaching stood for in the daily religious life of the Jew. And all that he has been compelled by the new light that has broken in upon his soul to set aside as practically worthless. For him it no longer counts as a way of salvation. The Divine promises, he sees, can no longer be limited by its guarantees. They extend far beyond its boundaries, and at the same time they sift and divide within its boundaries and within all other boundaries whatsoever. Nay, they have always from the very beginning, though men knew it not, been thus wider and narrower

than any religious system. The promises were made to something real and personal, not to anything so entirely accidental as was necessarily implied by membership in a particular race, however favoured, or adhesion to a particular religious system, however sacred. It was to the faith of Abraham that the promises had been given. God had not chosen him arbitrarily. He had chosen him because he was what he was, a man of faith. And if a nation, a religious and racial brotherhood, had been founded on that faith, the promises were not automatically assured to it. Only in so far as Israel was faithful could even it inherit those promises. Israel's religious tradition was no doubt the world-witness to the promises of God. But it was not in itself an effectual guarantee that those promises would be fulfilled in any soul of Abraham's children. Nor on the other hand could it claim the exclusive monopoly of those promises. It was but the pledge of their wider fulfilment. And now the time had come for the redemption of that pledge, or rather for recognising that it had always in fact been redeemed.

No more revolutionary word surely was ever spoken out of the heart of an ancient and authoritative religious system. And that word had its immediate effect. In a single generation, in every Jewry throughout the empire, little knots of eager souls heard it gladly, and hearing it drew away from all that was traditional in the religion of their race, and banded themselves, a thing unheard of, in closest religious fraternity with men of Gentile stock and Gentile religious heredity. And yet think how simple, how inevitable, that word of St. Paul was for one who had at all felt the reality of religion, who had

had that reality brought home to him as the life of Jesus brought it to the Pharisee of Tarsus. It was but the recognition of the fact that religion is personal, that it does not consist merely in the provision of a general way of salvation, but in the individual apprehension of that way. But it was something more. It was the proclamation of the fact that even the most traditionally established and the most Divinely sanctioned way of salvation may itself change, may become generally insufficient in presence of a fuller and more vital way revealed to a deeper and more vital faith in the soul of man. It needed only that Christ should come for the faith of a St. Paul to be equal to the venture which undermined the exclusive religious polity of Israel and brought it tumbling into ruins, and erected on its site the fabric of a universal religion.

And yet let us look at the other side of the picture. Are we to suppose that St. Paul saw clearly the full measure of his work of renewal, that he knew exactly how completely he had demolished the old, how greatly he was building the new? He fought indeed with the fervour of a profound conviction for the integral triumph of his own individual faith. For its sake he resisted Peter to the face, and resisted, too, the compromising spirit of the original apostolic group. He was sure that if it was to prevail there must be radical abandonment of the old religious customs and associations. He was sure too that if it did not prevail, the liberating faith which the Spirit of Christ had brought into the world would be annulled in its very beginnings. Yet through all the uncompromising and irrepressible daring of his spirit, there worked too a strain of caution, not indeed

the caution that is aware of itself and so, as a rule, defeats its own ends, but the caution of a grateful and reverent instinct. St. Paul's caution was as much a part of his characteristic faith as was his courage. For if his faith taught him that the way of salvation may and must change, it taught him also that it can never change. If it taught him that the system which had grown up about the Law and the prophets, which claimed to represent exclusively the spirit of the Law and the prophets, which made that claim with a show of reasonableness that was justified to the full by the witness of tradition and history—if, I say, his faith taught him that this system was doomed to destruction, it taught him too that the Law and the prophets were being fulfilled in the new order which was replacing the old, and that it was exactly their need of fulfilment that had procured that replacement. That special quality of his faith is apparent in the whole tone of his thought and feeling. It appears in the eager wistful yearning of his heart towards Israel, in his conception of Israel as the depository of the promises, in his unshaken faith that Israel will speedily recover its worthiness to inherit the promises by recognising their real fulfilment, above all in his reverence for the Scriptures of his race and in his rigidly traditional method of interpreting them. If St. Paul was a revolutionary, he was also a traditionalist. If he was a man of consummate daring, he was also a man of finely tempered caution. And he was both the one and the other unconsciously. He was both because his faith made him both.

St. Paul's moment was not the only moment of crisis in the history of religion. In the history of Christianity

itself there have been already such moments and they will again recur if religion is to live among men. It is not necessary that they should recur with all the gravity of change which marked the dawn of Christianity. But of one thing we may be certain, that when they recur their main features will be the same. The causes of crisis will be the same, the circumstances will be much the same, and the spirit which will shape such crises to fuller religious reality and fruitfulness must be the same spirit of St. Paul. There are not wanting signs that we ourselves are living in the midst of such a crisis. The established religious systems are losing their spontaneously religious character. They are losing their faith, or rather they are losing their power of communicating an immediate faith to their members. Instead of nourishing their free and native faith in God through membership in a religious society, men are forcing a faith in the society in order that they may believe it possible to have faith in God at all. The society has ceased to be the instrument of their faith and has become its object. They will force us to declare that God does not exist at all, or at least that we have no certainty of His existence, that He does not exist *for us*, if we cannot admit that He has planted here upon earth some infallible guardian of His truth and interpreter of His will. Ecclesiocracy is for us, as it was for the Judaism of the first Christian century, the specialised form of idolatry. And now, as then, a new and ardent faith in goodness, love of goodness, readiness of sacrifice for the sake of goodness—a faith, a love, a sacrifice, which are becoming more and more religious in their character, which are more and more consciously felt as directed

to, and inspired by, God—are growing up outside the borders of the churches with their haughty and exclusive claims. It is a moment when the spirit of a St. Paul is needed. Once again we need to hear the bold announcement, the announcement as of an assured conviction, that the promises of God are not and never were given through the Law, through the religious system as a magical and infallibly effectual medium, but through the righteousness which is of faith, a faith which may indeed be mediated through the religious system, but which may also be the immediate response to outside movements of thought and feeling that seem to be directly inspired by the Divine will and that must therefore be incorporated by the religious system if it would remain a living and effective instrument of the Spirit of God. There is indeed no religious society which will admit that membership of it dispenses with personal faith, that it assures a magical salvation. But then neither would the Judaism which St. Paul knew and in which he had been nurtured have admitted that it made such a claim. It too would have assured St. Paul that he was but travestying its real religious attitude. None the less St. Paul was right. He exposed the real religious weakness of Judaism. Religious exclusiveness is not only harsh and untrue in itself, not only a denial of God by shutting Him off from a part of His world. It also tends inevitably to the creation of a false security for those who are within the favoured fold. It leads to the idolatrous worship of the system, to a proud and arrogant trust in it which is always the implicit and often the explicit denial of God.

And yet let us to whom the traditional church is dear

remember for our comfort that yearning backwards of the spirit of St. Paul in virtue of which he drew with him into the transformed faith so many of his companions in the ancient tradition. For us that conservative spirit is still more necessary because it is so much more hopeful and so much more possible without any failure of loyalty to the onward call. The Christianity of the past which we have inherited is still, in spite of its temporary and partial hardening and reaction, true enough to God to be led by those who will be faithful to its spirit into the new land of the eternal promises.

III.—THE LOVE OF GOODNESS

“Abhor that which is evil : cleave to that which is good.”—
ROMAN xii., 9.

That is the phrase of a man who knew his own soul. It is no loose flourish such as we are apt to indulge in in excited and indiscriminating moods of moral enthusiasm. It is not a mood but a character that is expressing itself there. We feel, on reflection, that the man who spoke thus knew us and all the concrete phases of our hopes and fears, our efforts and difficulties, better far than we know either ourselves or them. We talk easily of loving goodness. St. Paul does not, even when the verbal antithesis is most tempting. And he refrains from indulging in the verbal antithesis just because he feels that it would introduce or suggest a certain dishonesty. It is not that he does not feel that to love goodness is just the supreme attainment for us all. It is rather because he feels that it is the supreme attainment that he does not dare lightly to suggest it as a description of the present mood of those who desire to serve God's cause of goodness. It is because he has learned himself the costliness of that attainment, the feeble measure in which it is at all possible for men, the actual forms which the attempt to reach it takes in us.

Let us look, then, more closely at the forms of St. Paul's expression, remembering that we are privileged to see in them the forms of his experience, and to see, too,

more clearly the actual forms of our own. And let us consider, too, to what this universal experience witnesses with regard to our relations to God. First of all, it is a universal experience, is it not, that the love of goodness first declares itself under the form of a great hatred of evil? Read the lives of the saints of all countries and all religions, and you will find that this is the universal note of their experience. It does not matter what their view of the world-order and of God's relation to it may be. Their particular philosophy of life and of the place of evil in it may be what it will. You may have a St. Augustine insisting in season and out of season that evil is not a positive thing, that it is the mere privation or absence of God's nature from that aspect of things in which it appears, that it is practically a no-thing in a world which is essentially God's. But the moment that same St. Augustine turns aside from mere theorising and looks in on the actual state of his own soul thirsting for God, evil has become for him the most positive, in reality the only positive, thing in the world. On every side of him, without and within, there are forces which are dragging him down, which are his relentless and unescapable enemy. His love of goodness is a love of something which is far away, which is not here, which is remote from all he is and does and from all that immediately influences him, which can only translate itself as hatred, inveterate and undying hatred, of all that. Evil has become for him the very substance, as it were, of all nature from which only the constant miracle of God's grace can deliver. It is true that the contrast between the theoretical and practical view of things, between a man's philosophy and his religion, has hardly ever been so violent as in the case

of St. Augustine. Yet even if it were always as violent, it would still be perfectly natural. For we cannot begin to turn to God's goodness with real desire without feeling in practice that sense of our utter personal unworthiness, and of a gigantic conspiracy on the part of all natural things and influences to keep us unworthy which we can only meet by a bitter and relentless hatred. It is an enemy that lodges within. It is an enemy that tempts from without. We want to serve God, and the desire is at once expressed in and paralysed by this ferocious hatred of evil.

Or again, take experience on a larger scale. Leave out of account for a moment the individual experience, and take those phases of general experience which are revealed in the beginnings of every new religion or of every human movement of reform. You will find the same tendency at work, the same general result declaring itself. Men begin to look for a better order in obedience to some Divine impulse which stirs them almost unconsciously, and immediately the whole world of their actual knowledge becomes black and repellent. The existing order becomes a nightmare from which they long in vain to be delivered. The tenacity and force of its roots in a distant past make it only the more formidable and hateful an enemy. Its consecration by an age-long custom only makes it the more hideous and diabolical an idol, arrogating to itself the worship that we would pay to that veritable truth and goodness which will not appear. There is nothing more characteristic of the beginnings of great religious and moral movements than this mixture of faith and despair, faith in some vague far-off vision of a perfect order, utter unrelieved despair

of the existing order, faith in the new heavens and the new earth, an impotent despair which tends to become destructive hatred of the actual heavens and the actual earth.

Well, St. Paul takes the mood just as it is, and reveals it as a natural and effective mood of all real religious feeling. He says, "It is God's work in you that you begin to see the evil, the blighting and destructive insufficiency of what is. It is God's work in you that you would fight against its appalling power, unconscious of the infinitude of your own weakness. It is even God's work in you that when you do not and apparently cannot prevail you still fight on against that which has become your hated enemy. Only begin now to discipline your hatred, to turn it into a positive inspiring force, to find in it what it really is or ought to be—your patient, determined, resistless quest of the good which is not yet here. 'Hate that which is evil, hold fast to that which is good.'" They are but two aspects of the same impulse, and they are in fact the aspects under which we yield to that impulse. Our love of goodness is but the faint desire of something which is far beyond our actual attainment. But it is most unmistakably ours nevertheless in a certain attitude towards our actual world; in a fierce discontent with all its dead custom, its sleepy self-satisfaction, its cowardly readiness to drift; in a discontent with all this so vivid and insistent that it must become a disciplined and earnest hatred of it all; and again in the disciplined confident clinging to every indication of good in this actual world, to every least stirring of better things, to every awakening of a better hope, to every thrill of the life that is seeking its destiny

not in what is but in what is to be. This is the method by which men really come to love goodness. It is only the careless delusion of an insincere and undeveloped conscience that can lead us to the easy audacity of claiming that we have already attained to anything that we dare call the love of goodness. And yet we do really love it when we hold fast to all its faintest hopes as to the sure stay of our life, when we hate everything that resists or hinders it as the one eternal enemy of our life with which no truce or compromise is possible.

And in these forms of experience we find surely the explanation of all those various and often contradictory conceptions of God's relation to His world which men have formed for themselves, which are the fundamental truths of all religion. We can now see why it is that men have always believed in a God who had no natural relation with them, who was infinitely apart from their actual life, who could only get near enough to that life to affect it at all by a miracle of grace and condescension. No doctrine of God that denies that apartness, that lightly and summarily annuls that distance, can ever satisfy the religious soul. The experience in which the soul's religion is rooted proclaims that concrete and terrible reality of evil which shuts out God from a world that is full of defilement in order that He may be and remain God.

And yet when we look a little nearer the same experience presses on us another conception of God. When we begin to feel that sense of the hatefulness of evil, we seem to despair of ourselves, to despise ourselves, almost to hate ourselves. Yet we soon discover that it is only then that we have come to believe in ourselves, to learn

what the real self is, to know the self that is worthy of being loved. And so again that utter rejection of the actual world, that hatred of the actual world, which follows inevitably upon our vision of a more perfect order, is the very condition of our loving the real world and believing in it. We know that it is real love of the world that betrays itself for the first time in that fierce rejection of things as they are. . .

And what does all this indicate but that God is all the time in us and in the world as that very spirit of the life of both ourselves and it which is ever urging that life towards some distant perfection? We could not begin to hate the actual if the ideal were not for us and in us more actual still. The miracle of God's grace is not that it violently intrudes itself from the outside into a world with which it has no natural relations, to revolutionise its nature. It is that it is in the world forcing it to hate its own inveterate tendency to rest satisfied with what it has become, forcing it to strive for ever after a perfection which recedes with every approach that we make towards it. So it is that what men have called the immanence of God, by which they mean this natural and constant relation to our life and the life of the world, is also true, is also a necessity of our religious sense. And so above all it is that both the conception of God as working naturally in His world and the conception of His transcendence, His apartness from the world, spring from the same sure and trustworthy root of all religious conceptions, the actual experience of the living soul. So it is that you cannot teach men either to hate the world or to love the world, either to hate themselves or to love themselves. But they will inevitably

begin to hate the actual world and their actual selves when for the first time they have come to believe in a world and a self which may be worthy of their love. So it is above all that life as it grows towards God can only express its real experience in terms which are apparently contradictory, and that that very contradictoriness of experience is the surest proof that we are at last feeling towards God.

IV.—THE PARADOX OF THE SOUL'S EXPERIENCE

"I am filled with comfort. I overflow with joy in all our affliction."—2 CORINTHIANS vii., 4.

There are men who seem to live all their lives at the heart of a great peace. The storms of life may buffet them, they may have to meet reverses and disappointments innumerable, their bodies may be marked by the stigmata of pain and their spirits worn by irritating and unintelligent opposition. Yet there always breathes from them and about them an air of serenity. They play a manly and courageous part in all the surface-struggle of life. They conscientiously do their day's work where the dust of battle is thickest, where the turmoil is most clamorous. They lightly take all the blows that are rained upon them, and deal them too perhaps with a kind of magnificent unconsciousness. But it is when they can retire from the confusion on the surface of things that they are really at home in the heart of some habitual inner peace. Nay, into the midst of the fray itself they bring the atmosphere of their spirit's home of quiet. No one has ever seen on their faces the joy of battle or heard from their lips the boast of doughty deeds or felt in their bearing the proud consciousness of hard things endured or of evil things fiercely resisted. They are spirits already here habitually throned above

the thunder, and we reverence them with a half-stupefied, half-fascinated amazement.

But there are others whose life breathes of battle, of its sternness, its joy, its varied ebb and flow of fortune, its fierce excitement, its spiritual exaltation. Their faces tell you that they are never really at home save in the midst of the fray. Their words burn with memories of conflict, of hard things done and endured. It is only in action that they come to themselves and only through action that they can remain true to themselves. Their very speech is action. It is a call to battle rousing the slumberers, and nerving the feeble, and goading the indolent, and concentrating to a white heat of passion the wandering fires of the blindly impulsive. Or it is a bared blade smiting the evil, or pricking the bubble of sophistry, or dividing with sure stroke the mingled web of motive and purpose. Such souls command not so much our reverence as our instinctive adhesion. They can help us because we feel so confidently that they know out of their own experience our weakness and our strength and know how the one may be conquered and the other made effectual.

St. Paul was such a soul as this. That is the reason that he has been so great an influence all down the Christian ages, that his influence has been most persuasive and most effectual at moments of strain and crisis in the history of the Church. He spoke the word of hope to St. Augustine when the Church, but for him, would have reeled under the blow dealt to that Imperial order on which it had grown accustomed to depend. He spoke it again to the soul of Germany when the Church could be saved only by a courageous reverence

for truth and simple straightforward morality which did not fear the breach of the Church's own order in order to secure its possession of those things without which it was worthless. He is speaking that word of hope to us again to-day, and this time not so much by his theology as by his own personality, by his religion, by what the man had himself become through communion with his God and shows himself to have become on every page he ever wrote. Indeed it was the man himself that spoke to Augustine and to Luther also, but they heard him primarily through his theology and heard him on that account, as I think, more faintly and indistinctly. St. Paul would no doubt himself have desired to be heard through his theology, for it is impossible to read him without feeling the delight he himself felt in the closeness and subtlety of his Rabbinical arguments. But it is just when he gets away from those arguments, when he has exhausted and squeezed them dry, that the whole man gets free to utter his faith and breaks upon us with one of those inspired sayings which kindle the faith and hope of the world. Think for instance of that glorious declaration, "Your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost," a declaration which proclaims the enlistment of the body in an eternal and universal partnership not only with the human spirit, but with the Spirit of God Himself, a declaration which makes every movement and activity of the body an expression of soul, a making or marring of the soul. And then read, I hope you will read it with a feeling of dismay, that piece of laborious Rabbinism which leads up to it, all of it of doubtful value and part of it surely false. "Every sin that a man doeth is without the body." It is surely a denial of the great truth

which flashed in living fire a moment afterwards out of the free soul that had forgotten for a moment its delight in verbal distinctions and verbal argument. For the truth is that no sin that a man doeth is without the body. It is within and through the body whatever it may be, and in being committed it has grown into the body by some stronger and deeper root of habit, a habit at once physical and spiritual. The man who has once been dishonest has a body which will henceforward shrink less from dishonesty. Every nerve has become less rebellious to the evil suggestions of spirit. No, St. Paul, in a flash of religious genius, asserted once and for all the entire spirituality of the body. But his argument, in which he evidently took an almost childish delight, would confine that spirituality within the narrowest limits.

Yet it is just this delight of his in his own peculiar gifts that draws us to the man, that endears him to us. He was a fighter for the cause of God, and he fought with the weapons that were ready to his hand, with the weapons which he had been trained to use. His delight in the feel of the weapon is one of the very things which make him so good a warrior, and so a warrior whom we can trust and follow. He teaches us to trust our weapons too. He reminds us that if we are called to fight the battle of God in our day we must be of our day and understand it; we must feel its needs and realise the way in which it feels them. We must know what kind of arguments and proofs will come home to men's minds, what kind of reasoning will stir and quicken their souls and and what kind will deaden and rebuke them. And it is well that we should remember this. For little as the

intellect may have to do with the origin of religious faith in any soul or in the general world of men, it has much to do with the sustenance and development of faith. Faith indeed is a God-given instinct in us. It is there in the depths of us all feebly bearing its witness to a something that we might be and were meant to be but are not. But left to itself it will become a mere weak sentimentality, or at best a morbid sentiment detached from the great interests of life. It needs a vigorous intellectual justification and application to every healthy instinct, to every legitimate human activity. And that can only be gained through living thought, through the range of present knowledge and the methods by which we try to increase it. St. Paul calls the theologians of this generation, both by his example and by his mood of unhesitating confidence in his own intellectual weapons, to the heroic enterprise of justifying the ways of God to the men of this generation. Yet that is what too often the official theologian will not do, nor permit others, if he can prevent it, to attempt. We want to be safe, and we forget that God's safety can only be wrung out of life and its manifold risks. We want to be comforted, and we forget that God's comfort is wrung most surely out of the labours and afflictions of the aspiring human soul.

For, let us remember it, that is where St. Paul found his comfort. "I am filled with comfort. I overflow with joy in all our affliction." That is not the word of a man who lay down under affliction. It is not the word of a stupid or a cowardly resignation. It is the word of a seeker and a fighter, of one who had learned for himself that in the hard stress of conflict with opposing ills lies the surest opportunity of finding God. We ought to

rejoice that we are living in an age when we are seeking God through much tribulation, when it is no longer easy to see His ways or to be sure of His large designs. We ought to rejoice because faith, an intelligent and virile faith, has never been easy and was never meant by God, whose own power inspires us with it, to be easy. It was an illusion, often a morally fatal and always a morally dangerous illusion, when men thought that they had only to open their eyes to see the clear track of God through history, when they thought that they could learn with the same kind of certainty as they learned the story of the Norman Conquest that just here in this particular event and not elsewhere, there in the fortunes of that particular people and of none other, did God appear and declare His will to men. We are just beginning to learn that great witness of all the prophets, that our God is a God who "hides Himself," but hides Himself in the general movement of history, in all the confused ardours and efforts of human souls. And there we must seek and find Him, and can only hope to find Him there by cherishing in ourselves a high purpose of goodness and an unvarying trust in goodness. Faith is always that difficult quest, and the joy of faith the joy of victory in and through that quest.

And it is just that kind of faith which will learn its own limits, which will know where it is necessary to resign itself into the hands of the unknown and the unknowable. There is a point beyond which we cannot know clearly, beyond which we cannot even act wisely. And it is just the man who has honestly used his intellect to probe and measure his faith who will keep his faith sound and pure when that point is reached, and will

keep too its exceeding joy. It is just the man who has fought with beasts at his own Ephesus who will resign himself to forced inaction with the glad confidence that God will still justify him and His own ways through him. The greatest lesson that a man can learn is how to find his comfort, to overflow with joy, in all affliction. It sounds a hard and indeed an impossible lesson. Yet many have learned it. They have been held in the grip of inexorable pain, they have gone down into the desolation of irretrievable loss, and yet have learned to feel the joy and comfort of God's nearness as never before. Yet they could not have learned it if, in their days of freedom to act and know, their faith had been but the lazy and facile admission of man's inherited hope in God. And if they have not learned it there, there is still hope that they will rescue it from the fire of affliction into which they have had to descend, and take it back with them into the world of action when God again restores them to it.

V.—THE SPIRITUAL VALUE OF DIFFICULTIES

"If I must needs glory, I will glory of the things that concern mine infirmities."—2 CORINTHIANS XI., 30.

St. Paul is defending his claim to be a minister, a servant of Christ in a measure which transcends even the high ministry of his fellow apostles. And his defence consists in a recital of the hardships which he had endured in the discharge of that ministry. There are things of which he will boast if he is to boast at all. And here let me turn aside for a moment from what I would say to notice the happiness of that word "to glory." In itself it reveals the nature of a true and legitimate self-assertion. It is an English word which exactly renders the generous spirit of St. Paul when he gratuitously reveals himself in what we usually and rightly consider as an ungenerous phase of character. What above all we feel about the boastful temper is that it is ungenerous. It is a forcing forward of one's self, not only at the expense of others, but in a scornfully careless disregard of them, an overweening contempt for the rights and claims they have by simply being there, which is the most heartless form of insult. And yet that verb "to boast" may indicate a noble side of character as well as a base. It occupies a moral zone which has as it were become neutralized. And fortunately, in our rich English tongue—it is the spiritual glory of our tongue that it does thus reveal a sense of the opposing motives which

may underlie every outward manifestation of character —there are two words which express in this connection the noble and the ignoble phases of character. To "glory" and to "brag" are the moral antipodes each of the other. Of the one we need say nothing. It is well that we have a word which groans for us under the burden of our hatred and contempt of the thing. But let us think for a moment of the other word and of the thing which it represents for us. It is possible for us to feel such a pride in the things in which we have lost ourselves, in the things to which we have given ourselves with an unmeasured devotion, that we cannot help giving utterance to it. And nothing is more legitimate, because nothing is more highly natural, on occasion. Such occasions indeed must be rare, but they come. The self will make its high imperative claim even when it is giving itself away to that which is not itself.

And that was the mood of St. Paul in face of those who would have detracted from his full apostolic dignity. He knew the full measure of his gain because he was passing once more in indignant yet elated memory through that bitter yet most sweet and satisfying loss in which he had found it. There was nothing that was not generous in that outburst of recognition of the steep path to victory which spirit must always climb. Even the note of indignation in it was an indignation with the blindness which could not or would not recognise the true method and the essential art of service rather than an indignation with the quite negligible offence to his poor personal self. If he was to put himself forward at all, it was as the living concrete expression of the truth he would have all men know and feel to be the saving

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truth of life for them also. "If I must needs glory, I will glory of the things that concern mine infirmities."

And now to return. But indeed it is not a return, for this digression on the value of words has been an apparent rather than a real digression. It has of itself brought me into the very heart of what I would say to you. I want you to think what it is that is implied in this recital by St. Paul of all the hardships of his apostolic life. For it is no mere empty recital of accidental events dragged into the light by a momentary necessity of self-justification. It is the revelation of an essential Gospel, of all that is essential in *the* Gospel. So often history only stirs lightly or pleasantly the surface of our emotions when it ought to enter into us and become the very stuff of our spirits. How do we perhaps usually think of St. Paul's purpose in this sudden outflash of his own story? We think of his ministry as the announcement of his great message throughout the Greek-speaking world. Along all the great thoroughfares of this world he had carried the message of Jesus Christ crucified and risen and ascended. It was a story which as it came must have delivered men from the gloomy and otherwise impenetrable prison of self, which in its mere telling would break the stubborn hearts of men and transform their lives. To carry that story was to be a minister of Christ. To carry it farther and wider than others was to be more a minister of Christ than others. And to do so entailed a greater cost and the facing of greater and more continual dangers. But those dangers were a mere historical accident of the undertaking and prosecution of the task, a pathetic accident if you will, an accident which to this day stirs

our blood as we listen to their enumeration, but in the last resort an accident still. They might have been evaded and the message been yet effectually borne, the ministry yet duly accomplished. This is perhaps how we think as we read. And all this is true. But it is only the outside of the truth. It is, I am sure, not the truth as St. Paul felt it when he bore this high witness to it. If he had only felt this, I doubt whether his witness could be claimed as high and generous at all.

No, for St. Paul to be a minister of Christ was not merely to announce a historical event, mere historical belief in which would procure a kind of magical salvation. And indeed no Christian has ever taught or believed anything quite so foolish and unreal and unworthy of the nature of God. Yet we have come very near, perilously near, such a folly, when we have conceived of some higher kind of belief in our Lord's death as having that magical effect, a kind of belief which in its distinction from mere historical belief becomes vague and intangible in character, which always tends, because of that vagueness of character, to fall back towards mere historical belief again. And there is only one thing which can give that belief a perfectly tangible and definite character, which can save it from the danger of becoming merely a historical belief. It is to give that belief a universal groundwork in human life itself. It is to reveal it as a universal experience of human life, as a belief which can be put to the proof anywhere in human life, wherever life is striving to become human.

And that is just what St. Paul did. He said, in effect, "The Christ that I announce to you is the revelation not only of the true character of humanity, but of the only

way that there is of forming that character. He is not only the Life, but the Way. He was not only the revelation of God in man, but the revelation of the only way by which God can come to be in man. God indeed is in man as the very principle by which he subsists at all. But so long as He is merely the life-principle in man, He lies there latent, unrecognised, a potency but not a power, yet a potency longing and striving to become a power. This is the secret of that division in your wills which you know, all of you—that burden of the law from which none of you escape. Hail that burden when you feel it, for it is the very schoolmaster which may lead you to Christ. It is already teaching you the way of the Cross by which you must ascend, the hardness and bitterness and yet the exceeding joyfulness of the struggle out of your lower self—which is the imperfect assertion of the Divine principle within you, or even perhaps your complete indifference to or denial of it—towards a higher self which will be the glad acceptance of that principle and all that it would be in you, the fuller and fuller assertion of it with your own living will. Christ was that human ascension in its completeness, that ascension crowned with the ultimate victory of very oneness with God's nature. But that same ascension is a possibility for all men and a necessity for them if they would be really men. And every step of that ascension is a veritable activity of the free human soul, of the human soul free to accept or refuse the cost and the effort which that activity involves. And yet every step of it also is a work of God within you, and would never have been possible even as a desire, much less as an accomplishment, if God had not been within you. Such is the sublime

miracle of your being, that your freedom is the very condition of God's making Himself within you. God ascends through your free effort from a latent principle to an abiding and developing Spirit. It is God in you that constitutes your freedom. If He were not in you, you would be dead, automatic nature—not the master and maker of will, but the slave and the creature of circumstance. God is beforehand with every effort of your will, making that effort more really your own. And even your ordinary experience will prove to you that it is God, the Universal Will, that is working in that upward spiritual effort of yours. For if it were your own only its results would stay with yourself and end with yourself. But they do not. In proportion as your effort is selfless, a struggle upwards from a lower self towards a higher, from what you are to what you would become, it wants to reach out to others and does reach out to them with blessing and real spiritual influence. You become spirit, part of the universal redemptive spirit of God. You may remain very human, and yet there detaches itself from you a healing power over the spirits of your fellow men. And Christ by His complete and victorious inner ascension had become that power in its completeness, the very spirit of God's healing power going out to nerve to higher saintship the highest saint of you all. In the fullest and most tenacious spiritual effort that any of you are making, it is Christ that is being formed in you, the hope of your glory. And yet I go back. Christ cannot come to you magically. It is your effort that brings Him to you, that forms Him in you. It is your own acceptance of His way that draws into you His life. You will never reach to Him save at the cost of that

incessant inner warfare which crushes every spiritual gain beneath your feet that you may ascend on it to higher things. Or rather you are reaching Him, He is being formed in you, more and more fully with every upward step. Hardness is of the very constitution of the spiritual life, hardness within and hardness without. The outer is always correlative to the inner. Rejoice that there are difficulties and oppositions and misunderstandings and hostilities. They are things to conquer and things which because this is God's world you will, if you are faithful, conquer. And in conquering them you have gained yourself, you have conquered the lower self which would have found no opposition or hostility in things, which would have been quite content to take them as they were. And you will have gained too, at long last, the power of revealing that hostile world to itself, of calling it to the struggle by which it too will ascend, of making it realise that it is God's world in potency, and must accept the way of its own Cross to become God's world in fact and in actual power. That is the secret of Christ Crucified, no magical annihilation of man's sin, but a Spirit that fought with all the allurements of sense and all the temptations to spiritual sloth or spiritual short-cuts, and conquered them all for itself, and is therethrough become an Eternal Spirit in man, nerving and inspiring him to resist continually the same temptations and to aim at achieving the same victory. That too is the secret of my own rejoicing in all the troubles I have had and may still have to endure, in the journeyings and watchings and fastings and hostilities of men which have accompanied and tried and purified my service of the Christ, which have of themselves enabled

me to bring at least some part of His living message to men. These things have been no accident. They have been Divine instruments called into being by whatever faithfulness I have had, and forging in turn a higher faithfulness in me. I could have avoided them and remained the shrunken creature I was. I have accepted them with high gladness of soul and Christ has been formed in me. The hardness of life is the evidence of God's presence in it. The way of the Cross is the eternal way of God's self-making in man."

So we may imagine St. Paul preaching to us in the Twentieth Century. For it is in essence the Gospel which he carried to the Greek world in the first century, and which he preached then with full confidence in its eternal efficacy because it had been revealed *in* him. After all the only Gospel which we can be sure will be true for others is the Gospel which has worked for ourselves. The Gospel which comes to us as life is the Gospel which comes to us through the lives that have already lived it; no magic-working announcement, but a living inspiration, and an inspiration level with the needs of life in all, yet equal to the highest possibilities of life in each. The Gospel of Christ is universal because it is the Gospel which every man must wring from his own experience when he tries to live satisfyingly. What was revealed in Christ reveals itself again and on the same terms in each such effort. And it is universal also because every man who has found that Gospel for and in himself has become thereby, whether he knows it or not, a universal saving force, a veritable part of the universal redemptive spirit of God. And that Gospel is not only of the end which life is meant to achieve, but of the means of

achieving it. It is the Gospel not only of holiness but of the Cross as the way of holiness, as the way which the pursuit of holiness necessitates and which in turn gives that pursuit its fruition. Hardness and difficulty are the note of God in human life, the perpetual assurance that God who worketh hitherto is working now with us and in us. "If I must needs glory, I will glory of the things that concern mine infirmities."

VI.—DEPENDENCE AND INDEPENDENCE

"I speak as a fool. I am, more."—2 CORINTHIANS, xi., 23.

There are men who speak boldly only to save themselves from realising their own uncertainty. There are others who realise so clearly the area of uncertainty that surrounds all knowledge, who feel so acutely that of what they know best there is still so much more to be known, that they cannot assert anything save with reservations. Of such was the great English bishop who, when a pupil gratefully acknowledged his explanation of some knotty point with a downright "Thank you, sir. You have made that perfectly clear," is said to have answered, "Oh! I hope not. I hope not." But there are others whose boldness is not a mask of ignorance nor their modesty a mask of knowledge. They are bold and modest in the same breath, self-assertive and self-suppressive in the same action. They are the men of strong individuality in whom character has its full play. They baffle us with their contradictions, because character at its best, or at least at its strongest, always appears to contradict itself. It is made up of movements that we think of as contrary. But these movements are only the necessary action and re-action of the same effort to express one's self. Men like St. Paul puzzle us. We cannot understand their swift changes of mood. In our pettiness we almost suspect them, when we dare, of

pose and theatricality. But they are only revealing to us in large what is true also of ourselves in little, that every expression of human character swings between opposite poles of feeling. What seems to us the change of mood is but the same mood in different moments of its revelation. With us the pendulum of character describes such a small arc that we think it stationary. With them it swings through the full semicircle of feeling.

It is this conceit of ours of the stationariness of feeling in character which has made our whole view of character so unreal, which has made the higher ideals of character more unreal than the lower. We have identified the Christian virtues with certain phases of feeling when we ought to have found them in broad expressions of active character which touched feelings the most various and even opposite. And we have paid for our mistake in the fatal sense of unreality or in the still more fatal habit of self-deception. We have tried for instance to induce in ourselves a perpetual feeling of humility, and we have only succeeded in generating an unnatural and quite unpardonable kind of pride. We have tried to hypnotise ourselves into an impossible constancy of patience, and we only expose to every rub of the world a fretful sensitiveness of nerve that becomes for us an intolerable weariness. We have made the mistake of thinking that we could make character by manipulating it from without, by running it in the constant mould of a particular kind of feeling. But character cannot be made from without, it makes itself from within. It grows by the use to which we put the total power that is in us, by the objects on which we spend our power and the means by which we spend it. If we use it for worthy objects and

in worthy ways, then our characters will grow healthily. If we use it for base objects and in base ways, then our characters will inevitably become diseased. It is because so much of the self-examination which we are taught to practise as a religious duty is a mere bothering about feelings that it is often so useless and even harmful. If indeed it is an honest feeling of what we have done and how we have done it, then it cannot help, except we waste time and sentiment even on that, being a real stimulus to the inner life. That kind of grubbing about the roots of life is wise and necessary, especially when we are most learning to live. Only let us be sure that we are seeking to give the roots freer play and stronger grip in order that the plant may grow more vigorously and healthily.

But, if the Christian ideal of perfection is becoming half unreal for us, the fault lies not in it but in ourselves. Let us take for instance that virtue of which we were just now speaking, the virtue of humility. This age has grown to be intolerant of the very idea of humility. We despise the man who cannot assert himself, who cannot stand by his conviction in the face of the most violent and unanimous opposition. Even if a man has no convictions at all, but only opinions, we expect him, if he would command our respect, to sustain them even to the point of blind obstinacy. They are his, and therefore he is chained to them by the requirements of our ordinary standards of decorum as Ixion to his wheel. It has become positively indecent to change one's opinions, as it is called. Obstinacy has become a kind of virtue, the equivalent of or the effective substitute for strength, the quality which compels men's fear and therefore their respect.

Or think of humility in that world of business which to day exacts the heaviest toll on human energy and power. In the hurried and feverish press the man who allows himself for a moment to be trampled on, who gives way for an instant, must go under and disappear. It is fuss and bluster and push that carry men through to success. In the great world of affairs force has become almost the only virtue which men appreciate and acclaim, and weakness the only vice which is unpardonable. And in that world humility would be a weakness of a specially unpardonable kind, for it would be a weakness gratuitously advertising itself. If we cannot be strong we must at least, at all costs, maintain the show of strength. Humility may be an excellent Sunday virtue, but it has no part in the fierce struggle of modern life. There to efface one's self is to be lost irretrievably. To advertise one's self, however falsely and blatantly, is to be already on the high road to success.

Yet in spite of the clamour of this popular judgment, and even in the midst of this modern hurry to be successful, and indeed wherever the energy of life is liberally expended, humility holds its old place as a permanent and unreplaceable element of worthy character. For it is just one of the poles of feeling on which all strength turns, as the other is self-certainty. That was the secret of St. Paul. It is the secret of every noble life. It is the man who is sure of himself with the certainty that goes straight to its aim, the man whose judgment does not waver or wait upon the breeze of public opinion, the man who holds up his heart to catch the inspirations that are abiding and constant in the real nature of human relations, the inspirations of justice and truth—it is

he and he alone, who in his independent strength has felt the very foundations of that strength in a dependence which is absolute and indispensable. There is the secret of humility, a secret which only the strong can learn. It is no yielding to circumstance. It is no feeling artificially produced in a void of the heart or the will. It is only possible for him who would be the master of circumstance. It is only possible for him whose heart and will are charged with purpose, whose action is strenuous and unceasing.

It may be indeed that such action will not always command what this age calls success, what every age I suppose has in its foolishness called success. But that only proves that such success is not real success at all. And do we in our serious moments ever think that it is? Is even the most thoughtless so carried away by these valuations of the crowd as to accept them in the inner silence of his own sober judgment? No, if life consists in such success as comes from elbowing the weaker, the gentler, the more timid out of the way and snatching the share which was justly theirs, then we feel that for the sake of such life we have lost the real reasons of living. We are not deceived except in so far as we want to be deceived. There is something in us which upholds quite another estimate of success. We feel that the measure of real success lay in all that we might have given and that we have placed it in what we were able to take. We remember with pain the generous dreams that stirred our youth, we contemplate with dismay the wasted opportunities of noble and worthy living. We feel the power that could have served the cause of right dried up and withered within us, the power

of affection, the power of sympathy, the power of sacrifice, the power of faith. We look round on a world of misery and wrong and greed, and we know that we were born to strive in our measure for the alleviation of these evils, that we could have reduced their amount and lessened their sting. And now we realise that we no longer care enough to help effectually, that we have lost the secret of understanding which if we had cultivated it would have given us the key to real usefulness, that we are no longer able to make the sacrifices which would avail, that we have lost faith in that betterment of the world which was entrusted to our charge. And then we try to compromise with this creditor whom we have defrauded, whom we shall never be able to repay. The saddest thing about much of modern charity—how we degrade the word in using it in such a connection—is not that it is a sordid and careless offering casually flung upon the altar on which we ought to have offered nothing less than ourselves. It is that it is the pathetic tribute to a lost ideal.

So after all we are not deceived. We still know what success really is. There is a Divine torment in man which will always remind him of that. And equally we are not deceived in our estimate of the character which leads to success. We do not think, in spite of the momentary worship of the millionaire and his methods, that force and bluster and self-advertisement are fine human qualities. We know them quite well for what they are, mere animal instincts cultivated to an amplitude and range of action of which the animal would be quite incapable. This kind of mere pushful force is not human strength. And we know that it is not, principally

because it has none of the variety and plasticity of feeling which every expression of true human character always has. Instinct has no range of feeling, and so it leaves us where we were, or rather hardens us into something infinitely worse than we were. But wherever human character is growing, it is growing because it takes us into the mystery of the reconciliation of feelings, the most opposite. It is so that God educates us. He calls upon us to be strong in order that we may be able to penetrate, by an experience which lies hidden in all attainment of strength, to the intelligence of weakness, to a native sympathy with it. He calls upon us to be impatiently sensitive to every emergence of evil in ourselves and in the world, to war against it unrelentingly, in order that we may attain in some measure to the secret of His patience. He calls upon us to assert ourselves unceasingly in a world which suffers only from our lazy connivance in its lower aspects, in order that we may learn to know what it is to be humble, to depend upon Him. And assuredly there is no other way of learning these lessons. We shall never feel with certainty our dependence upon God till we have courageously turned to account the power He has entrusted to us in a firm and faithful independence. We shall never be able to say sincerely with St. Paul, "I speak as a fool," till we are also able to say with sincerity, "Whatever others may be, I am, or at least I strive to be, more."

VII.—THE NEED AND NATURE OF DISCIPLINE

"I thereto so run, not as uncertainly ; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air."—1 CORINTHIANS, ix., 26.

We have again reached that period of the Christian year* which brings us face to face with the nature and the need of discipline. There, as elsewhere, St. Paul is the supreme master of Christian experience. And nowhere else is the wonderful sanity of his outlook upon life more clearly revealed. With a probe so deep that it reaches to the fundamental sincerity in us all he discloses the universal need of discipline. With the lightest of touches, a touch so light that we hardly know where it has found each of us, he suggests the nature of the discipline which each must make his own. Discipline is needed because life is a struggle for attainment, and experience proclaims with the more certainty the deeper it goes that no attainment is possible without discipline. As to its nature, that need not be laboured; for it is prescribed in the very nature of the effort which life is making, of the aim on which life is concentrating itself. I may suggest the contrast which I find implied in St. Paul's way of handling his theme in another way. Every art, *i.e.*, every attempt of human workmanship to reach its perfection, has its discipline. That is the necessity

* This sermon was preached on the First Sunday in Lent

inherent in it, the condition without which it cannot be an art. But every artist finds that discipline best, and makes it most surely his own, by simply concentrating himself on the practice of his art under the conditions set by his own time and place.

Let us see how this contrast bears on what we call the religious life, *i.e.*, on the fulness of our life as it aspires after God, its natural perfection. Life is itself an art, and just for that reason it is a discipline. You may perhaps wonder why I insist upon that description of life. It is because no other that I know will suggest so aptly and satisfyingly the aspect of life on which I wish to dwell, its religious aspect. For consider, the object of every human art is something outside ourselves. We seek in it to work our vision, our ideal, of some particular kind or aspect of perfection into a concrete form. But in doing that we do something infinitely more important. In seeking to give concrete form to our vision, we gain greater hold upon it, we make it more effectively our own. The poet or the painter possesses his vision more completely because he has made it a picture or a poem. So long as he was merely intoxicated with the beauty of his vision, so long as he allowed it to possess him merely and made no effort to possess it, he ran uncertainly, he fought as one beating the air. And so it exactly is with our life taken in its wholeness. It, too, has an end beyond itself, an end which it feebly tries to express as the glory of God, an end whose vastness escapes it merely because of its vastness. And that end will always escape us until it takes some tangible form which we can in some degree realise by our own action. There is nothing more deceptive than big religious phrases.

They intoxicate the soul when the soul wants above all things steadying. And the soul can be steadied only by its own purpose, and only when it sets itself to work out its vision of the Divine glory in definite deeds, only when all its aims and doings are consciously directed to the achievement of that distant end so far, we know, beyond the reach of our actual accomplishment. Only thus can we become something of what we aim at. We live into the Christ-Spirit by living out of it. Only by striving in actual deeds to reach what its inspirations point to can we make it in any sense our own. That was the note which St. Paul thought it most necessary to strike and strike again. Make sure of the aim of life. Direct all you do consciously to that aim. So alone will the aim become part of yourself. So alone can the God whom you have made the end of your life become increasingly its spirit. And so, too, alone will your life acquire the discipline it needs, and learn ever more surely that it must be a discipline in order to succeed.

What then is the nature of the discipline which the religious life demands to-day? It is a question which nothing will definitely answer except a wide extension and deepening of religious life among us. The answer is certainly not to be found in mere formal imitation of some method of discipline which had its origin and its justification in a distant past. Such an answer is not merely unsatisfying. It is a positive delusion in that it turns our attention aside from the facts which we ought to be facing. Let us for a moment consider two answers which have been given to this question in the past and their correspondence with the occasions which called them forth. From the dissolution of the Roman Empire

till the dawn of the Renaissance Catholicism had but one answer to the question. It was that the religious life could only be lived safely in seclusion from the ordinary world. No answer could have been more natural in that age of universal and brutal conflict. It was impossible to escape from the play of wild and riotous passions which formed the life-stuff of the history of those centuries. The Church indeed was a redeeming force, laying here and there its soothing touch upon the open sores of the body politic. But even the Church itself, when its temporal or even its supposed spiritual interests were endangered, was compelled to resort to the ordinary methods and to use the ordinary instruments of power. Only in the cloister, afar from the world's turmoil, was the religious life possible. Or for a moment the dream of a Francis came true through its own fervour; and religion walked barefoot and undefended, save by its own inherent goodness and unfailing ministry of mercy, through a world sickening of its own cruelty and violence.

The other answer was that given by nascent Protestantism. Luther filled the void which was left by the downfall and rejection of monasticism by his doctrine of vocation. He taught that the religious life could be and must be lived in the world, that every human calling was as its name implied a vocation of God and must be made such, that the Kingdom of God could only be established in proportion as each man sought to do the will of God in and through his special calling. Like its predecessor it was a noble ideal and involved a special discipline. We can see how much of an advance it was upon its predecessor; but we can see too, I think, that the

advance was possible only because the condition and character of the times had changed. Yet an advance it was. Protestantism has been charged with establishing a kind of spiritual aristocracy, and perhaps the charge can be justified if we think of Protestantism only in its Calvinistic form. But assuredly Luther's doctrine of vocation tended to the democratisation of religion.

Yet think how insufficient the teaching of Luther has become, and that through a new and revolutionary change in the circumstances of our time as compared with his. He lived amidst a people of simple burghers and peasants, engaged in a few clean and honest trades. If his religion was individualistic, and it was probably not a whit more individualistic than Christianity as personal religion always has been, I will not say always must be—yet if it was individualistic in any special sense, it was because the men with whom he had to deal were much more free and individualised in their actual work than we are to-day. The change which has passed upon the face of Europe is enormous. Every industry is an organised network of activities demanding the services of the workmen on its own terms. Men labour a whole lifetime without seeing more than a detailed and fragmentary part of the whole to whose purposes they are contributing, without seeing or being able to see the purposes and effects of the whole. Their sense of responsibility is deadened by being so miserably foreshortened. The redeeming force of moral imagination is necessarily altogether lacking to their labour.

And apart from all this, by way too of compensation for it all, life is, apart from actual work, more free, more varied, more interesting. A kind of Dionysiac rage of

life, unsteadied by any sense of responsibility, has descended upon us. Invention has enlarged the world of each of us, if I may put it paradoxically, by reducing the world common to us all. We roam easily over vast spaces where our fathers trudged at most a few weary miles from the homestead of their birth and life and death. We lightly escape the strong moral ties of place hallowed by family traditions and inherited associations and responsibilities. And then, too, simplicity has fled even as an ideal of life, except when it is revived as a fashionable affectation as little simple as can be. Luxury has so much increased among us and become so natural that this very affectation of simplicity is but its last and I think not least demoralising refinement.

In such an age as ours, it is evident that Luther's doctrine of vocation no longer applies. It is impossible indeed to say what is the religious discipline demanded by our age. And it is just this impossibility that is translating itself in all the fantastic revivals and imitations of the past with which we are so familiar, in spurious or at least futile monasticisms, in societies of Franciscan poverty, in Tolstoian brotherhoods, and the like. Such experiments indeed are not to be dismissed with a sneer. That is far from my intention. They are often the noble experiments of earnest men. But the hope that informs them is too like despair. It is a chimera of troubled hearts and paralysed wills. The new discipline which we need will not disclose itself till the religious spirit descends upon us again, till, that is, men set their hearts once more with one accord to the true aim of life.

And it is because I think that spirit is actually beginning to take possession of us, because at least there

are signs that men are not satisfied with living a life that ends with the unsatisfying satisfaction of their own immediate desires, that there is hope of the emergence of the discipline which we so much need. It will be at least a discipline which will correspond with the changed circumstances of our time, with the complex social organisation of industry which has replaced the old order of individual vocation. Its first object must be to humanise this vast industrial machine. To this end we must recognise that in modern democracies there is such a thing as a collective soul, a collective conscience, and that this soul, this conscience, must be appealed to and inspired with the sense of vocation. The organised working machine is no more necessarily mechanical than the free individual worker of the past. It too is human, it too has a soul to be evoked and stimulated, capable of feeling the call to the satisfying service of God. We can even see certain religious inspirations and aims which for the future must necessarily be reserved to it, which are necessarily denied to the fragmentary individual save through its ministry and mediation. It alone can secure that the primary aim of all social and industrial organisation shall be the health of the souls and bodies of men. It alone can procure the subordination of the money-symbol, which we have allowed to seduce us into the grossest of idolatries, to the reality that lies behind it—the effective subjugation of nature to human needs and fertilisation of nature into human values. In some such way will the social conscience play its part in laying down the new life-discipline which we need. And the present day dreamers of millennial dreams, if as is probable they may be deceived by the event in almost every

detail of their hopes, are at least magnificently right in their religious conception of the function and duty of the social soul. The social body must deliberately keep itself under, it must subordinate itself to the inspirations of the regenerated social soul, it must cease to run uncertainly, allowing a debasing poverty hère and a still more debasing luxury there, if it too would not become a castaway.

VIII.—GRACE AND CHARACTER

“My grace is sufficient for thee : for my strength is made perfect in weakness.”—2 CORINTHIANS, xii., 9.

The natural is the basis and the instrument of the supernatural. That seems to me to lie at the root of all exposition of religious truth which is at all likely to be fruitful and profitable for our time. Yet if we are to master that lesson, we must always remember that in our actual experience the natural and supernatural do not subsist apart. They are but names which we have given to two different aspects and elements of the same concrete fact. Every movement and activity of our life is one and indivisible. It cannot in fact be broken up into two separate and independent parts.

Yet there are two ways of looking at every human action. On the one hand it has its place in a vast ordered world of cause and effect. You can detect its occasions, you can trace its effects, you can give it its exact position in the world of events. It is what we mean when we speak of it as natural. But on the other hand that action springs from vast mysterious depths of unknown power. It issued upon the plane of the natural order from hidden sources of being, it came from those secrecies charged with and inspired by incalculable forces, forces which cannot be reduced to the measure of

mechanical cause and effect. You know what a machine will do in a given set of circumstances, or at least the skilled mechanic does. But though you know a man much more sympathetically, though you are immeasurably more intimate to the occasions of his action, you do not know what he will do ; and that, not merely because he may be what we call capricious, but because he acts out of a fulness of power and a largeness of motive which he himself has not fully realised. We are something more and greater than we know. Our deeds are less than our purpose, and our immediate purpose is less than our vague and distant ideal, and even that ideal is less than the underground founts of being from which our manhood flows. Every worthy human purpose is a self-humiliation of something infinite that it may become incarnate in the world of finite fact. And even every unworthy deed of man is a prostitution of that infinite power out of which we act, a false and distorted presentation of its character which witnesses still, by its very distortion, to that character. It is love debased or justice twisted awry or truth tampered with. And through the base love and the false judgment and the doctored truth we still see what love and truth and justice are. Man cannot get away from the supernatural in man. He may even degrade himself into a part of the mechanical order of nature, he may become a mere creature of habit, but it will still declare its neglected or perverted power in monstrous passions or in insatiable desires or in the weary monotony of the sense of irreparable failure.

And indeed, however much we may think of the sum of things as one, one in origin, one in direction, one in

destiny, we can never too much insist on the fundamental distinction, for our thought and still more for our own spiritual growth, of the natural and the supernatural. But, again let me say it, they are always acting together, they co-operate in every movement of life to produce the result of that movement. And it is just there that we have been false to fact, and in being so have robbed life of its essential dignity and greatness. We have thought of the supernatural as making occasional irruptions into the natural where we ought to have thought of it as always working or seeking to work in and through the natural. We have thought of the natural as the enemy of the supernatural when it was only its instrumental medium. Indeed everything in the natural order that is in fact hostile to the supernatural is but a perversion of the supernatural itself. The devil is but the perversion of God's nature. He belongs to the supernatural order. He is the supernatural in revolt against its true self, and forcing the natural into complicity with its own defection.

And now let us think, in the light of this view of nature and supernature, of the action of God's grace. It is one of the most comforting words which the language of religion has ever used. And yet we have robbed it of too large a measure of its comfort. For we have thought of it only in its signal and resounding victories. We have thought of it coming in triumph to conquer and reduce its foes. And so indeed it always does. Yet the ordinary manner of its triumph may not have been that which we had imagined nor its enemies those whom we had represented to ourselves. "My strength is made perfect in weakness." It is a very

word of God. St. Paul had penetrated to the very heart of Jesus, to the secret of the Divine action, when the assurance grew in his heart that those were the words of the risen Christ addressed to his own special needs. The power of God is perfected in the weakness of man. You are overborne by the sense of your own weakness, and you long helplessly for some great and signal deliverance from it. You want to rise from your knees encased in the panoply of an invincible strength. It may be faith and a very high measure of it. But it may be a subtle and most dangerous faithlessness. And faith must be trebly strong to face the disappointments which such an attitude of soul has inevitably to encounter. It may be well that faith should become more reasonable. For God's power in you will not be perfected in a day. None the less that power may be yours from that very moment of your need onwards. For in that hour of darkness that heard your exceeding bitter cry a new hope was stirring within you. Else your cry would never have gone up to God. And the warmth of that hope was the passing of God's spirit in your soul, it was the reviving touch of His grace. And with that hope you have arisen in the strength of a new purpose. The passing days have tried it and made it familiar with the rubs of a hard reality. Many a time it has grown cold, the old weaknesses of your character have threatened to undermine it again and again, it has been hard put to it to persist against the familiar solicitations of your old habits and surroundings. Yet you have stood firm, you have been more honest with yourself than in the past, you have learned where to expect the special pitfalls of your life and learned too to avoid them, you have lifted

up your heart towards the things that are honest and lovely and of good report, you have consecrated all the irksome petty effort of your life to be true to its best self by waiting quietly, patiently upon the help of the great God in your prayers. You think perhaps that the effort is great and exhausting, that the effect is little and disappointing. Yes, but it is in the effort that God has been with you. The effort has been His as well as yours. It is His grace that has inspired it, His grace run in the special mould of your character, adapting itself to its special powers, suffering in its special weaknesses, feeling the strain of its special temptations.

And the effect is not so little as you think. For it is not to be measured by what you have been able to accomplish. It is measured by what you are becoming, one who is growing to hear the call of God above the call of self; one who begins to feel the joy of the upward strain towards the heights of life; one who is more and more ready for the soul's great adventures; one who is learning to place duty before enjoyment, sacrifice before satisfaction, service before gain; one who may yet hope to find all gain and all satisfaction and all joy in the life which has gone forth from the centre of self to minister through the full circle of its opportunities and its powers. That is the true effect of the grace of God in you, the real power which He is perfecting in your weakness. And He has wrought that effect by working through all that was most natural in you, through all that specially belonged to your individual self. And you have helped Him to work that effect by the sincerity of your self-knowledge, by the earnestness of your self-direction, by the simplicity of your effort to do the best you could see

to do, which gave you that self-knowledge and that power of self-direction.

Or again think of the action of God in the social life of man. It is not by revolutions that God works there with the greatest sureness and success. The ends of God are not attained by turning the world upside down. They are attained by turning the world in upon itself, by sending it to the secret source of its own power, to the sincerity of self-judgment and the slow patient endeavour to establish that judgment on the earth. There is nothing more pathetic than the vision of a world sick with its own wrongs, yet paralysed into inertness by its sense of their magnitude and looking in its helplessness for some cataclysmic judgment of God to deliver it from them. It is indeed something, and a very great something, to see the signs of dawn on the horizon where others see only the general darkness with which they are satisfied. But it is useless and worse than useless merely to proclaim our discovery, to speculate on the changed look of the land when the dawn at last will break, to hug idly the selfish hopes of satisfaction it will bring to us and of confusion to our enemies.

For the dawns of God do not break so at all. We must go forth to meet them or they will never come. The world of spirit does not roll round mechanically on its axis. It takes the living spirit of man to move it towards the light. There is nothing against which we need to be more on our guard than this belief in a mere fatal revolutionary progress which is taking hold of the modern mind. Progress there is I most earnestly believe; but if it is it is because the spirit of man is progressive, and in the proportion in which it is truly progressive.

And that progress is not constant and uniform. It varies as the ages listen or fail to listen for the calls of God, as they put the assisting grace of God to proof by quietly and patiently facing the evils which beset them and labouring manfully to subdue them, or on the other hand as they slavishly endure them or denounce them with mere futile railing. The social question is always a moral question. Every social difficulty must be solved, if it is to be solved, by moral means. It will be solved no more by the impotent covetousness of those who have not than by the victorious rapine of those who have. And even if to-morrow that covetousness should prove victorious and that system of rapine sustain defeat the solution would be no nearer than before. It is only when men face the social wrong which offends their consciences as a wrong which they in their measure have wrought, for which they in their measure are responsible; it is only when they are learning to treat the share of others in that wrong with a true intelligence and a high charity; it is only when they are ready to build up the social hope with patient labour and willing sacrifice, that the power of God can begin to declare itself in the affairs of men. For it is through these weak and common elements that the power of God is wrought. I do not indeed mean to deny that the mere proclamation of the hope may be itself a work efficacious to that end. I do not forget that the outstanding work of Jesus was the deliverance of the message—"The kingdom of heaven is at hand." But I remember also what gave that message its power. It was the burning love, the simple, natural, everyday sacrifice of Himself for the sake of others of Him who delivered it. It was the fact that He

healed the sick, that He helped the blind to see and the deaf to hear, that He laboured to restore what was defective in men, that He understood the sinner and believed in the social outcast, in short that He loved greatly. If He preached the Gospel to the poor, He also loved one who could not bring himself to sell all that he had. If He saw the danger of riches, He understood and pitied those who were beset by that danger. And so He gave the message currency among the hearts of men and power over their wills. Only so can even the greatest message of human hope accomplish its perfect work.

Yet I do not deny that God's power may come once and again in sudden violence and terror. Revolutions happen and continue to happen alike in the outer life and the inner. To many a prophet throughout the various change of human history has that word of God come—"I will shake the heavens and the earth and the sea and the dry land : and I will shake all nations, and the desire of all nations shall come." Times come when the things that can be shaken must be overthrown in order that the things which cannot be shaken may be more firmly established. The destroying storm must sweep over the land. But it does not destroy only, it purifies. And, after all, its suddenness is an illusion of our ignorance. It has been prepared in the fierce heat of burning suns, in the dead languor of sultry days. Then the slow imperceptible movement of a myriad silent currents of air were preparing the crash and terror of to-day. So it is with every revolution, whether of the outer or the inner life. The movements of man's spirit have prepared it. Perhaps his spirit has fallen into the the sluggish lethargy of material contentment, and the

great avenging currents of moral force rush in to restore the human equilibrium. It is the revolution which destroys while it purifies, and perhaps in its blind rage destroys more than it purifies. Perhaps, on the other hand, the steady moral currents, growing silently from many a point of the human compass, have converged to this momentary sublime rage of purifying power. In either case it is out of the beggarly elements of human weakness that the power of God has been wrought. It is in the conscious effort of man's soul that the grace of God is always declared.

IX.—GRACE AND VOCATION

“ Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith ; or ministry, let us wait on our ministering ; or he that teacheth, on teaching ; or he that exhorteth, on exhortation ; he that giveth, let him do it with simplicity ; he that ruleth, with diligence ; he that sheweth mercy, with cheerfulness.”—ROMANS xii., 6—8.

How broadly human, how profoundly intelligent of our nature, is St. Paul's doctrine of grace ! Where we are inclined to regard what is commended to us as the fundamental religious fact as something abstract, elusive, magical, he recognises at once the most concrete, the most intimate, the most real of all experiences. We remember perhaps still the confusion through which we laboured in the days of our youth to appreciate what our religious teachers could mean when they talked so freely about the miracles of Divine grace. We were at that impressionable moment of our lives when religion begins to have a meaning for us. It came like the mysterious whisper of some far-off but intensely real world, transforming our actual everyday world with the witchery of its faint music. It was like the spring sunshine evoking all the simple but wayward coquetry of the young earth. It mingled like a subtle radiance with all our youthful enthusiasms, ardours, hopes, ambitions, vaguely purifying and exalting them all. But its sterner and more solemn accents we could not hear, or hearing

could not respond to them. We felt when our religious teachers spoke of the grace of God that they were speaking of something intensely personal and yet, to us, infinitely remote and unrealisable. Our unintelligence was greatly our own fault, no doubt, the natural incapacity of the superficial emotions of our inexperienced youth to feel the reality of the things that belong to a later and more matured stage of the soul's life. But was it not partly their fault as well? To us, at any rate, they seemed to speak so vaguely of something that, if it were as real as they asserted, ought to have found some echo in our anxious and expectant souls. And we were only too well and too poignantly aware that it found none. We tried to stimulate artificially an experience which refused utterly to declare itself in a natural way. We tried to feel that kind of magical possession by an immediately victorious spirit of goodness which we conceived the Divine grace to be. We thought of it as the invisible and irresistible invader of the enemy's camp of our own deceitful hearts, and we awaited in painful suspense the hour when we should at last know that the camp had been stormed and the victory won. It would all take place without our participation, even without our knowledge of what was happening till the great transformation had been achieved. Was not that very suddenness and monopoly of renewing power the distinctive mark of the grace of God?

But then the miracle was so long delayed that we hailed with gladness the assurance of another kind of religious teacher that the Divine grace was given gradually, that it was imparted through a constant waiting upon it in specialized acts of worship, and supremely

through regular and devout participation in the sacraments of the church. No doubt it was again our own stupidity that led us to think once more of this grace as no longer indeed sudden but still magical in its coming and operation. We thought of it as infusing itself imperceptibly into the very substance of our souls in those moments of sacramental expectancy and attainment, so that we could go forth from them renewed in spirit and confident of victory all along the line. Each sacrament might indeed be a gradual transformation only, but at least it was a transformation which had affected our souls as a whole, which had carried their every power nearer to full communion with the will of God. And we were disappointed to find that the old weaknesses which we had hoped would magically disappear were there still. Each felt the irk and the gall of his own defeat. Each could recognise the trace of the old scar upon the soul of his brother. We had dreamed somehow of a uniform perfection into which the grace of God would indubitably lead all souls who honestly and patiently sought it, and here we were still in all the variety of individual weakness and defect.

Now neither the one set of teachers nor the other need have been necessarily in the wrong. But assuredly, whether it was our fault or theirs, or the fault of both, we had learned the lesson they would have taught us in the wrong way. All this teaching of theirs, whether the teaching about some sudden and miraculous grace of God to be imparted we knew not how or when or where, or the teaching about a miraculous grace imparted at definite moments and places and in definite ways, was for us in the air. It had not gripped the concrete

reality of our individual powers and weaknesses, of our everyday use of those powers and suffering from those weaknesses. And until any teaching about the grace of God has done that, it will be in vain. And that is just what St. Paul, with his supreme insight into human need and his supreme experience of Divine power, so clearly saw and so plainly expressed. He saw the actual variety of human need, and he felt the corresponding variety of Divine grace. He saw, with the sincerity of a man who knew himself and therefore knew his fellow men, that the weakness of each soul could only be countered by the strength of each soul or rather through its capacity of strength, and that therefore in that capacity worked the grace of God for each soul. He saw as a fact of ordinary observation that men's gifts differed widely, and seeing that from the point of view of God's action he saw too how it meant that God's grace was acting variously through that difference. He saw, in other words, that God's grace was inherent in us all from the very beginning, that the moment the feel of his own special power and capacity had come to a man, in that moment he had vitally touched the redeeming grace of God. But he saw something more than that. He saw that that grace must be used in order that its redemptive efficacy might be disclosed. And it was on that aspect of individual human use that he laid all the stress, he who above all men saw all things in God and desired to give God all the glory.

So alone, he saw, could men give God the glory. He did not lose himself, or allow his hearers to lose themselves, in some haze of abstract religiosity. He brought them down at once to the solid earth, permeated by the

redemptive substance of Divine grace. He said to each, "You are a prophet. At once to your prophecy. Labour at it in the sweat of your soul, in the measure of the faith you have and can acquire. You are destined, and it is the Divine destiny for you, to be a servant of your fellows, to minister to their most intimate needs. Let that service occupy your whole thought and care. You have the gift of teaching. Be a teacher with your whole soul. You can stir the sluggish wills of men. Up, and send the authentic thrill of life through those among whom you live and labour. Let your exhortations sting and rebuke, and fortify and console. You can give. Learn to give as naturally as the unregenerate man in you now longs to receive, to give with simplicity. You were born to rule, to mould by a kind of elemental unconscious instinct in yourself the destinies of others. Do not allow yourself to grow into the too easily acquired persuasion that your instinct has a right to its own loose and careless play of force. No, it is a Divine trust within you; so use it with diligence, with the unceasingly corrective sense of the greatest of responsibilities. You were born with the heart that feels. Do not become a lazy, self-pitying, self-flattering sentimentalist. Learn what may be the hardest of lessons for you just because you have that heart of pity, but what will also be the noblest and the most useful lesson you can ever learn—to show mercy with cheerfulness. And in setting yourselves to learn these various lessons, to cultivate by use these your various powers, you will each be experiencing that concrete grace of God by which He labours eternally and to good effect in the soul of each of you, you will be making room for the continual

expansion of His grace in your hearts. You will not despise any special instrument which deepens the sense of His communion with you. For you above all men will know the weariness that needs the rest of regularly recurring moments of meditation, the exhaustion of spirit that needs to be fed on the bread of God wherever and with whatever forms familiar to you His Holy Table is spread. But you will not treat the meditation of the spirit as a magical charm. You will not divorce it from the activity of the spirit. Labour and rest, activity and meditation, the outgiving and the intaking, will be but moments, and each of them a necessary moment, in its healthy life. And you will know too that if both are necessary, it is the labour that makes the rest natural, it is the activity that gives the meditation meaning and value. You at least will have learned that the inward life of the soul may become the veriest of delusions, if it is not provoked, sustained, necessitated by the fruitful, outward life of the soul."

That is something like the teaching of St. Paul about this great matter of the grace of God—a teaching so sane, so balanced, so accordant with the healthy experience of the human soul, so worthily cognisant of the ultimate vital control of the Spirit of God in all that experience. But yet perhaps we feel that there is something lacking in this doctrine. We feel that our need of deliverance from enfeebling disabilities, from the spiritual paralysis with which evil afflicts the soul, is greater still than our need of reinforcement of natural aptitude and powers. And we are right. But we are hopelessly wrong if we think, and our religious hope so often expresses itself in such a thought, that weakness can be magically overcome,

that evil must first be miraculously done away in us in order that goodness may have free play. We need certainly above all things to be delivered from the tyrannous control of evil, but it is only an active goodness that can effect that deliverance. The soul which is strenuously set upon the unselfish use of its own peculiar strength, that soul and that soul alone knows the joy of victory over its own evil, and knows too how partial that victory always is, what need of unceasing active diligence there is that that victory may be maintained and extended. For there is perhaps no form of human evil which is not capable of being redeemed by an unselfish and sustained purpose of goodness. However loathly evil may have become, however inveterate the habit of it has grown, however deeply it may have penetrated into the very stuff of our soul through centuries of heredity, still it was once a possible goodness, it was once among those indifferent possibilities of our nature which might have been turned to goodness though they were actually turned to evil. And so the settled will of goodness, working through whatever is still sound and worthy in us, can redeem even that which is unsound and unworthy, can at the very least reduce the venom of its sting, the unwholesomeness of its pervading presence in the soul. Active goodness wins upon evil, forces it back into at least impotent passivity, and often extracts from it that soul of goodness which had lain unsuspected in it. So it is that in the experienced facts of our soul's life the grace of God actually accomplishes the great deliverance. Its action is not magical but vital, not an alien forcing of life, but the intimate spiritual chemistry of a life's own special purpose and power throughout the whole substance of that life.

Yet you will object again perhaps : " What you say is no doubt partially true. It holds here and there, for this soul and for that. But after all it is only one instance the more of that universal tendency of men to force all experience into the mould of their own particular interests. And religion is specially exposed to this kind of illusion. It may be a generous illusion, but it is an illusion all the same. It shirks the most obvious and also the most general truth of fact. Is it not far too often true that it is the apparent strength of men which becomes their greatest weakness and intensifies all their other natural weaknesses ? Is it not the case that the heady instinctive use of our special power becomes our surest undoing, that it aggravates our every natural defect, that it enlarges us into an atmosphere of diabolical self-confidence where the soul can breathe nothing but the mephitic vapours of pride and vanity which stupefy and suffocate it ? " It is true. To fail of recognising such a fact would be indeed to be false to all experience, and to all that God would teach us through experience. But St. Paul at least was not obtuse to such a fact. His religion was not built upon the illusion which would ignore it. We can alas ! use our special powers so as to accentuate their merely instinctive quality, so as to aggravate their original self-regardingness. And then we are using them, not to develop the Divine grace inherent in them, but to nullify it. We are resisting the Divine action through the very means by which God had meant us to co-operate with it. We are intensifying evil through that which was meant to eliminate evil or to redeem it. We are quenching the Holy Spirit. We have made ourselves guilty of the unpardonable sin. So

it was that St. Paul laboured to remind us of the diligence, the simplicity of soul, the high and serious mood of responsibility, in which we must always use those powers peculiar to ourselves which are also God's means of grace implanted in each of us from the beginning.



X.—ILLUSION AND REALITY

“The Lord is at hand.”—PHILIPPIANS iv., 5.

It was in no spirit of craven fear that the Apostle uttered these words. To him they were the sufficient ground for his reiterated call to the church which he addressed to rejoice in the Lord. He could conceive no greater reason for the abundance of religious joy than the certainty of this hope. He knew indeed that the Christian religion had been founded upon this very certainty and the faith in its immediate fulfilment. And yet it was not fulfilled as the Church of that moment expected it to be fulfilled. Was the Christian hope then an illusion? It is a question which more than any other will try the quality of the religious spirit.

And if we would attempt an answer to that question we must remember first of all that the life of religion more than any other expression of life centres in the future. All life indeed which is at all worthy of the name has this characteristic. The life which would satisfy itself in the present, which can exhaust its satisfactions in the enjoyment of its passing emotions, is not life in any high sense at all. We feel that such life is dissipating and not preserving itself, that it is the loss and not the gain of life. Life can only attain any kind of permanence by having a constant hope and a consistent aim. It is the thing it would be and achieve, the yet undeclared result of its growing character and its

increasing effort, that is the test and the substance of its real quality. If we would judge life, our own or that of another, we ask, if we are wise, not what it is, but what it is seeking to become. And even if we do content ourselves with asking what it is, we still think of its present, not as a happy or unhappy accident, but as a living and necessary result of a living past. The present on which we pass judgment is for us a future already reached, the future which the past had set itself to reach. We think it is the present we are judging, but it is really the past which has come to be the present. Life as the object of judgment is never merely an isolated present fact, but a present which reveals the meaning and intention of the past, and whose own meaning and intention are revealed to the future of its hope and aim. And if this is true of every expression of life, it is supremely true of that inclusive expression which we call religion, that expression which in itself sums up and unifies all other expressions.

But again let us remember that the future at which the religious life must aim is not a future towards which it can, as it were, be content to go. It is a future which it must force to come to itself. That is the true miracle-working power of faith. It is not satisfied with the hope of reaching one day a miraculously transformed world into the possession of which it may enter at a given moment. It transforms the world itself here and now. It incarnates its vision as fact. It is a miraculous activity, not a miraculous reward. Its reward is perfectly natural, viz., the perfect satisfyingness of its own miracle-working effort. It is no limp confidence that the mountains which bar its advance will one day magically

disappear. It is an active force which can and actually does remove them. The aim of religious faith does not remain stationary till we reach it. It comes to meet us as certainly as we go forth to meet it. Faith is charged with a magnetic attraction which cannot be denied.

And it is just here that the element of illusion appears in the religious life. What we aimed at changes its form as our faith has compelled it to come near. It reaches us under forms we had not expected, and which are often so far from our expectation as to disappoint and perplex us. For a time we cannot even recognise that the miracle has happened, that the real aim of our souls has been reached. Even we who receive God's answer fail to recognise it for what it is. And perhaps there is no surer criterion of the reality and strength of religion than its capacity of endurance through these moments of disappointment and perplexity, its power of surviving the illusions which the particular forms of its hope had created for itself. A religion is real when it can feel that God's actual gift is greater than its own preconceived notion of what the gift would be.

Let us reflect for a moment upon the nature of religious faith in its concrete activity. We feel within us the actual call of God. Our souls are conscious of something which is at once their inspiration and their constraint. Some purpose of unselfish goodness has taken possession of them, and it is a purpose which will not be denied. They are astir with hopes and aims which reach beyond all limits of self-interest, which have their roots in something deeper than our ordinary self-regarding instincts. But just because these aims extend into some ideal

realm, they are compelled to make a splendid guess at the nature of that concrete end on which they are set. Until the end assumes a definite concrete form, the purpose of the soul hangs limp and hesitant. Yet the form which we are compelled to give to that end of goodness towards which we would strive is necessarily imperfect. It is to some extent an illusion. It is projected upon a background of darkness by the dim light of our moral imagination. Our intellectual prevision of the new phase of goodness which God requires is not equal to our certainty that His goodness possesses us, urging us on to some victory on its behalf.

We are here face to face with one of the great difficulties of all moral progress, and it is a difficulty which is becoming more acute in our day. On the one hand the desire of goodness cannot become an active reality until it has found its concrete end. On the other the real character of that aim is never fully revealed until the new movement of goodness has had its perfect work. The aim at which we consciously direct our effort is nearly always an illusion. And yet we must have it, or the effort of our souls would never become free to attain the real aim which God has meant us to attain. That is the explanation of much that has been most puzzling not only to the mind but to the heart in the history of religion. The heart has clung to the illusion which has once evoked its energies, which has once inspired it to expend its wealth of goodness and devotion, even long after it ought to have learned the true nature of the satisfaction which God had in reality given it, the true nature of the goodness which God had in fact wrought through it.

And on the other hand the mind has too often discovered the illusion only to deny the Divine nature of the impulse which drove it to frame that illusion, and to discard as false the religion which had for a time worked through it. That is indeed the twofold difficulty in which religion is at the moment placed. It has to contend with a conservative heart which persists in giving a permanent and Divine character to the illusive forms into which in the past it was compelled to throw its certainties. And it has at the same time to contend with a superficial use of the intellect, with a heartless rationalism which has detected this formal illusion and thinks that it has thereby convicted religion of falsehood and unreality.

Do we begin to see how an answer to the question, "Was the religious hope of the second Christian generation an illusion?" is possible? That generation looked for the visible return of Jesus to establish the kingdom of perfect justice before it itself should pass. The form of that hope proved to be an illusion. That visible return was not at all the condition of the coming of the kingdom, or of our Lord's rule over it. Both were to depend upon His invisible and vital presence. His life had become the unfailing inspiration and support of all those who had pledged themselves, in obedience to an invincible devotion, to live according to its aim and spirit. He had become most truly one with them, unceasingly forming His strength out of their weakness, His unity out of their variety, His Divine purpose out of their human effort. So the society rooted in righteousness, pledged to righteousness, making for righteousness was born. So it was governed by the very Spirit and life

of Jesus Christ. So the prophecy of Paul was fulfilled—"The Lord is at hand." He was already nearer than St. Paul had thought, and in a grander and more fruitful way than St. Paul had as yet dreamed of. He was not coming visibly to supersede human effort, to annul that growth in which lies the supreme reality of human goodness. No, but He was already there while Paul spoke, there as He would continue to be all days to the end, there affirming and strengthening all that was real in human goodness, there confirming by His presence a promise in life which all the forces of the world-spirit could neither annul nor deny, the promise of ultimate human redemption. God's fulfilment was greater far than man's expectation. God fulfilled the poor human weakness of which men had so much despaired that they could only see the Divine future in its overthrow and supersession. God wrought His miracle in the human material which He had always been preparing for it by His ceaseless and often imperceptible work of judgment. Men expected the miracle in a cataclysm of judgment which would destroy the unworthy material and replace it suddenly by a worthier and a more tractable. And yet perhaps if they had not framed that expectation for themselves they would not have proved tractable to God's real miracle, they would not have been prepared to receive His transforming power.

But again think how teachable real religion is, how it opens at once the heart and the mind to recognise the reality of the grace they have received from God. Within the brief period of his ministry St. Paul had abandoned his apocalyptic hope of a visible advent, abandoned it no doubt because he had come to feel how much greater

than any such magical transformation of the visible order could be was the silent transformation which from his own experience he knew that the Spirit of Christ was effecting and would increasingly accomplish in and through the hearts of men. He learned, what only the greatest spirits can learn, the real nature and quality of God's action upon himself and his time, and the littleness in comparison therewith of his own most impassioned forecasts of what that action would be. That is always the mark of religious greatness, to be able to see what God is actually doing with us and through us, and to feel sincerely how much greater it is than all our most glowing expectations beforehand as to what He would do.

XI.—LIBERTY AND AUTHORITY

"Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers: for there is no power but of God; the powers that be are ordained of God."
—ROMANS xiii., 1.

It is impossible to conceive of a more uncompromising assertion of the claims of authority than this. It is so extravagant that it defeats its own intention, so absolute that it leaves its very intention in doubt. Even those who are most anxious to push home the claim of authority will feel that it leaves them doubtful as to how they are to meet that claim. It is not only a single power that demands their submission. The powers that be for each of us are many. We cannot possibly obey them all, for obedience to one very often involves a rejection of the claims of others. They do not merely compete with one another for our allegiance, but in competing they mutually neutralise their claims. To obey some of the powers that be, we must not only disobey but even actively rebel against others. If we are to believe that some of them are ordained of God, we must believe that others are not only not ordained of God, but that they have usurped a power which was His.

Now it is out of this conflict of authorities that the modern sense of liberty has been born. I do not indeed mean that the demand of liberty is a new thing. I do not even mean that that demand has taken on for the first time a spiritual character. But I do mean that it

has in our time become a spiritual necessity, that its spiritual character has become the dominating one, the only one which makes it effective and real, the one by which alone we can realise its true meaning and measure its true value. In the ages that are gone spiritual and temporal authorities were often in conflict. But they were not in fundamental conflict. The spiritual authority still claimed the temporal authority as its instrument. The temporal authority still looked to the spiritual authority for its sanction. Their differences were temporary and arose out of jealousies which could be easily allayed or misunderstandings which could be easily removed. It was possible to obey one or the other, and yet to feel that one was obeying the deeper and fundamental claims of both. But now the spiritual authority itself is divided, and the temporal authority no longer rests its claims to obedience upon any connection with any of the diverse forms of the spiritual authority. The territory of each is carefully delimited. The nature of the authority of each is carefully distinguished.

Now it is in this state of things, apparently ordered and exact, in reality confused and confusing, that the modern sense of liberty has had its origin. And it is here that we must try to seize its spiritual value. And first of all, in the strictest sense it has a spiritual value. For liberty is an act of the soul. It is not a mere condition of the soul's action. Let me try to make clear what I mean. When we speak of liberty, we often mean nothing more than the removal of all impediments in the way of our acting as we will. We mean the freedom to do what we like. Now there is no such liberty anywhere. In hundreds of ways we are subject to the

control of forces outside us which we never think of questioning or challenging. We are placed in circumstances which determine our action, and sometimes its very character, at every moment. We yield without thinking of it to the forces of tradition without and heredity within, to the innumerable subtle forces of social pressure. But even if we had the freedom to do what we like, we should still feel ourselves the victims of the most irksome form of slavery. . Imagine if you can a human soul absolutely free from the control and influence of other lives, a soul which felt the guidance of no tradition, which escaped the pressure of the social opinion and the social feeling that surrounded it, which could take its own way undeterred by social censure, unrestrained by any sense of social responsibility, unimpelled by the force of social sympathy, unregulated by the claims of social duty. That would be a soul free to do what it liked. And can you imagine anything more terrible than the lonely misery of that slavery to the imperious sway of passing moods and soulless passions? Of such liberty the soul dies. If it could be attained we should all lie in the hell like sheep, the shrunken bloodless ghosts of men, traitors to every human faith and hope, already the blaspheming captives of the nethermost pit of despair.

It is by a very different liberty that the soul lives. It lives by its supports, its dependences, its attachments, its natural bonds. It is by its thousandfold contact with other life that the blood courses warmly in its veins, that its passions can be generous, its hopes fruitful, its faith sincere. There is no mine and thine in the spiritual world. There is no mine but is also thine, and is all the

more mine in proportion as it has become more thine. And this is what I mean when I say that liberty is a positive spiritual act. It is not the mere negative attempt to escape from the natural bonds in virtue of which alone our life is real. It is the positive attempt to grapple ourselves to life more closely so that we may draw from it all its nourishing force, so that we may transmute that force into new individual forms of living force, so that we may give back what we have been given enriched and purified. It is not to do what we like, but to like increasingly to do what we ought. It is to possess ourselves, to rejoice that we have found ourselves, in the great claims of duty which the heart bound to other hearts dictates. Freedom is only an outer condition in order that it may become an inner state. And as an outer condition it is sound and worthy only in so far as it helps us to attain to the inner state.

So that we come back to this. Liberty, even in its outward sense, is the condition and the guarantee of a worthy obedience. In its inner form it is that obedience accepted as the supreme act of the soul. That is why liberty has become the supreme human need to-day. We want to know what to obey. From so many different directions the ideal makes its appeal to us. It speaks to us with so many different voices, with such varying kinds and degrees of authority. We must be free to judge between its many forms. We refuse to be the victims of a mere accident in the highest act of our spiritual nature—in its submission to the power that is worthy to guide and control it. We would make the obedience which will constitute our character, which will give it its distinctive colour and quality, an act of decision and of

voluntary choice. We have often been deceived by mere ignorance of the facts with which we were dealing. We have been the slaves of an ignorant will, plunging recklessly into the welter of facts in the hope of snatching some result we knew not what. Now we claim above all things to know, to obtain the means of right judgment, to infuse into every motion of our will the freedom of an active intelligence. And again we want to know only that we may act, only that we may convert our knowledge into moral power. This is the freedom we desire for ourselves and demand for all. It is a freedom whose sole aim would be to make more sure of the life in which we are rooted, to distinguish its native differences of value, to co-operate with its processes, to turn to account all that is best and worthiest in it, to redeem all in it that had been neglected or overborne or decayed.

But it may be objected that this is giving the individual soul a spiritual supremacy over that on which it is dependent. If the very liberty of the soul is to obey, to yield to some higher influence, then how can it take the act of judgment into its own hands, how can it have the power to decide upon what is highest? And here we come to the very heart of the matter. Our passive conception of obedience has been utterly misleading. Obedience itself is not passive but active. It is no mere submission to an accidental influence. It is primarily the act of recognising, of desiring, of voluntarily co-operating with the influence in which we feel the breath of life for us. Of all the spiritual influences which make us, influences that have come from the past and engirdle us now, none could keep its life if an active force did not go forth from us to seize it, to incorporate it, to make it

more alive. We are surrounded by the hopes of the past and the desires of the present; the tradition of a thousand generations proclaims in our ears the faith and the hope by which humanity has held up its heart to the stern demands of life; the courage of the past and the prophecy of the future are gathered up in enduring centres of spiritual force. And yet all these things would be inert and lifeless if the living souls of men were not there to absorb their treasure and transmute it continually by the chemistry of life into something new and strange. Every soul that lives aright, that lives in the great liberty of God, has not merely added to the spiritual tradition of mankind. It has transformed the tradition of the past into what will be a nobler tradition for the future. So it is that we cannot live aright except by the way of obedience, and that we cannot obey aright except in the spirit of liberty. We cannot live except through the life that humanity has lived already. We cannot hand on that life except we have transformed it through a free intelligence, a discerning heart, an energetic will. And we dare not hand it on at all but with noble and fruitful increase.

XII.—THE SOBRIETY OF FAITH

"For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith."—ROMANS xii., 3.

There are men, and St. Paul is one of them, whose deepest thought betrays itself in some chance phrase. Where thought is well in hand, where its object is independent of the life of the thinker, it easily attains a perfectly ordered development and clearness of expression. That is the reason that scientific expression is so clear. But where thought is more intimate to the life of the thinker, where it deals with the mysteries of his own inner experience or of general human experience as interpreted by his own deepest and therefore intellectually most intractable convictions, it is apt to be confused in expression and to aim at increasing clearness and force by way of constant repetition. Original religious thought is nearly always of this kind, and has upon it the birthmarks of this peculiar stress of deliverance. The mystics are all of them typical of this heroic effort to grapple with a possessive but reluctant truth. Hence their habit of repeating the same truth in a hundred different forms and in such various connections. They betray the hope, ever defeated yet ever indefeasible, of catching the manifoldness of their conviction in some close fast-holding net of confident and sufficing words. And often they succeed just where they have least

expected success, just where they themselves may be least able to perceive that they have attained it. Some chance paradox, some occasional flash of sincerity from the clash and conflict of opposing certainties may reveal to us more of their meaning than all their elaborate effort to set it forth in clear and satisfying order. It is so especially with St. Paul. All his sustained Rabbinical arguments often leave us cold and unconvinced, when some sudden, apparently careless, phrase will reveal to us the whole burden of truth under which the great soul has been labouring.

It seems to me that we have here just such a phrase. Like every great religious seer, St. Paul felt the fundamental religious importance of individuality. He felt that the Divine Spirit must, above all things, create personality, that it did not, and being what it was could not, from without compel men to a barren uniformity, that its mission was to unite itself with the elements of distinctive force which lay latent in each life, and help them to grow into their destined fulness of specialised and individual power. The Spirit was no arbitrary Divine quality constraining all the natural variety of human souls to a uniform type. It was a life as wide in its concrete action and influence as all the actual variety of individual capacity, ever seeking to mingle with the secret springs of individual life, to concentrate and fertilise its resources, and so to lead each life into the fulness of its own necessarily partial and imperfect heritage. It was this conception of the work of the Spirit that found expression in St. Paul's doctrine of justification by faith. Obedience to the Law, righteous and just and holy as that Law was, was but the bondage

of the soul to a universal and uniform standard of life. But the Spirit of life itself could never be incorporated in a uniform standard. It could only be incorporated in the action of living souls, which action, if it were free, if it were really responding to the Spirit, must be continually nullifying every possible standard by the mere fact of outgrowing it. The human spirit was free only in so far as it transcended the standard which had once been sufficient to it. The law of the Spirit of life was no fixed and definite code. It enlarged and accentuated its claims with the growth of life itself. And life could only grow through faith in that expanding law and in the spirit which forced it to expand continually. The soul of man could only be justified through an active faith in that spirit of liberty which led it on increasingly into the law of liberty. It seemed as if obedience to the Spirit involved not merely the nullification and transcendence of a merely external law, but also a growth of the law of liberty along so many lines of individual effort and growth that it would be no longer possible anywhere to find a common term for that law. It must diverge more and more into a quite nebulous vagueness and an individuality as arbitrary as ever its uniformity had been.

But here St. Paul feels another aspect of truth which delivers him out of his difficulty almost before it has become a difficulty. If the work of the Spirit is ever tending towards this multiplicity, it is by the very same movement tending towards unity. The Spirit may be working through the actual variety of human character, since that variety is the only concrete material which it has to work on. It may be compelled by that existing

variety to co-operate in producing results which seem to be even more various still. Yet it is the same Spirit at the end as at the beginning of its activities. And because it is the same Spirit, it leaves in all this individuality and variety of its results the sense of a real controlling unity. All these souls that have been true to the Spirit in their own imperfect measure and degree recognise a kinship between themselves, a kinship by which each of them is the richer, in virtue of which each shares in the fuller life, in the oneness of the very life of the Divine Spirit itself. That is St. Paul's conception of the Church. It is the unity of all the variety which the Spirit has effected, a unity which depends for its very existence upon all that various sincerity of every member of the Church, a unity which must be in some degree felt by every member if the variety is to be saved from disintegration and the waste and self-defeat of mere arbitrary presumption. In other words the Church is the communion of various souls, a communion which could not exist if that variety were not real and effective, a communion without which that variety would be monstrous and diabolical.

And so it is that in a flash St. Paul reveals the character of the Christian soul. "Let no man think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but let every man think of himself soberly as God hath dealt to him the measure of faith." It seems at first sight a mere prudential maxim, a maxim on which any common-sense leader of men might have insisted or rather must have insisted. But in reality it is something far greater than that. The whole faith of St. Paul is finding there its practical expression. It is exactly this faith of his that

has impressed upon himself the need of sobriety in self-appreciation. For him that same sobriety must be the test of the reality of every man's faith. For it is universally the perfect translation of faith into practice. The faith in the Spirit which will make each of us free is the faith which will also reveal to us the limited scope and value of our individual freedom. It is indeed the measure of all we can be worth to God, but how little is that measure. How much our imperfection needs to be supplemented by thousands of other dissimilar imperfections. How much too each of those incompletenesses can help to complete the others. In the spiritual sphere we are linked together by a great chain of mutual dependence and inspiration. The spiritual presumption that might soar into some dehumanising void is held down by the saving contact with sincerities and certainties other than its own and begins to learn from these the sobriety that steadies and redeems it. The spiritual shyness or self-distrust that might so easily die down into torturing despair in its own unaided loneliness is fortified and uplifted into a sober trustfulness and courage by the inspiration which God dispenses through the comradeship of all the hearts that truly serve Him. Even a Moses may need to have his hands upheld until the evening by the humble service of an Aaron and a Hor.

There is an insobriety of self-judgment which is only spiritual cowardice. We have lost faith in God because we have lost faith in ourselves. We need to recover a sober faith in ourselves in order that we may have faith in God. And we will recover that faith as we feel the Divine pulse beating once again through the heart of the common world, as we recover our faith in our fellow men,

And again there is an insobriety in the judgment of ourselves which takes the form of an accusation of circumstance. How entirely it reveals the lack of fundamental and necessary faith. We lay the blame of our failure upon some indefinite unpropitiousness in things. We talk of ourselves, or listen contentedly, with perhaps discreetly-veiled approval, to others talking of us as wasted in our particular sphere of labour. We bemoan the fate that robs us of our chance of that successful toil, of that fruitful service which we believe to be possible for us, but which we have never yet succeeded in compassing. It is all the grossest self-deception, the insobriety of judgment which argues a lack of faith. Wherever you are there you can do the work which God needs to have done through you. Nay, there you are doing it if you have faith in it and Him. To lose the sobriety of faith is to paralyse your energies; and if they are paralysed be sure that it is because your faith is waning. For the man who keeps his faith in God there is no human centre from which he cannot work fruitfully, there is no human circumference within which he will not work fruitfully. And he will work there to good effect because his faith in God means his faith in men and in those very men of all men among whom his lot is cast. The special duty which is yours, the actual men and women among whom you live and work, to whom your service is pledged, that is the duty which will prove your faith, those are the men and the women in whose fortunes God is putting your faithfulness to the test. If you cannot find in them all the nobility, the worth, the inexhaustible promise of humanity, you will find it nowhere. If you cannot love them and find them

most worthy of love, nay, if you are not discovering their lovable-ness more and more the more you live among them and serve them, then you will never discover what it is to love your fellow men. If you do not feel that to live among them has enriched your life as it could not have been enriched elsewhere, then your life is not capable of serious enrichment. And if other labour finds you out and claims you, honour it as the call of God. Take it up simply, whole-heartedly, with the courage which is the only true and worthy sincerity, without the self-depreciation which is always a gratuitous and unpardonable insincerity. The sobriety of faith demands that we live wholly in the now. For us there is no past and no future if the present is not vividly and absorbingly our own, or rather if we have not wholly and unreservedly pledged ourselves to it. We so often indulge in a maudlin regret of the past, in a feverish expectation of the future. But all that was good in the past is indubitably ours if we are using the present with whole-hearted belief in it—in what it is, and what may be made of it—and it is ours on that condition only. And all that will be good in the future depends upon the energy and faith and love with which we extract it out of this present hour.

There lies the sobriety of faith, that sublime discovery of the great and courageous soul of St. Paul. We are pledged to find all the Divine we shall ever have faith in where we are, when we are. We are pledged to the discovery of the lovable-ness of man and even the lovable-ness of God in our actual here and now, in the men we know, and with whom and among whom we labour, in the times which have made us and which we in turn are making. The

sober faith knows no presumption and no despair. And it has escaped both, in that it is a faith which is at once the most individual and the most social, the most independent and the most dependent, a faith which demands and produces the utmost possible individuality, and also the fullest possible communion with all that is God-like among men, whether in fact or in promise. To the soul that thinks too highly of itself or too lowly—which is but another and a subtler form of the same radical disease—the world will make no response, it will not disclose its divinity or its capacity for the Divine. But to the soul that thinks soberly of itself according to the measure of its faith, the world will respond anywhere, its very deserts will blossom as the rose, its veriest clods will glow with some Divine fervour, calcined in some redeeming fire of God.

Oh ! blessed soul of St. Paul, exalted immeasurably in the Spirit, but ever sober in self-forgetfulness and devotion, that didst dare to believe in the redemption of a world through the knots of simple and unregarded folk that gathered to thy call in the purlieus of mighty cities, thou hast taught us the simplicity of that faith by which alone the world can be made, without which it is ever being unmade.

XIII.—IMMANENCE AND TRANSCENDENCE

"Who will deliver me from the body of this death?"—
ROMANS vii., 24

"I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me."—
GALATIANS ii., 20.

Mr. Chesterton has, in his inimitable way, enforced the fundamental opposition between the religious ideals of Christianity and Buddhism by reminding us of the contrast between the image of a Christian saint in a Gothic Cathedral and the image of a Buddhist saint in a Chinese temple. "The Buddhist saint," he says, "always has his eyes shut, while the Christian saint always has them very wide open. The Buddhist saint has a sleek and harmonious body, but his eyes are heavy and sealed with sleep. The medieval saint's body is wasted to its crazy bones, but his eyes are frightfully alive. The Buddhist is looking with a peculiar intentness inwards. The Christian is staring with a frantic intentness outwards." And the reason of this contrast in representation is a contrast in belief. For the Christian God is essentially other than himself. God's love has declared itself in giving His creation and every single life in His creation a free and separate existence. And it has done so that it might ever continue to be love, just that it might always have something to love and something which could answer it with love. But for the Buddhist God is the ultimate elusive secret of his own

soul. The Christian must look out for ever with increasing admiration and surprise and love upon a creation which in all its myriad forms shares with himself in a divinely derived but divinely independent life. The Buddhist must for ever withdraw from every feeling of surprise or admiration or love as from so many delusions which tempt him away from God.

Now I am not greatly concerned, as indeed I think neither is Mr. Chesterton, to insist on this contrast simply as between Buddhism and Christianity. He uses it in the interests of healthy religious belief among ourselves in this Western world to-day. He wishes to point the contrast between the practical results of what he rightly regards as the orthodox Christian belief in a God who transcends His world, and of what he regards as the immanentist heresy prevalent among us at this moment both outside and inside the Christian fold. Now I should like to say how much I agree with Mr. Chesterton when he insists on the truth of that conception of God as transcending His world which he claims to be peculiarly Christian. To forget it or to depress it is to lose touch with all that makes religion real. Every image which is valid for man's soul in its attitude towards God, in its dealings with God, testifies to its truth. We are God's soldiers, recruited in every generation to take our part in a battle which He has waged since the first insurgence of evil in the world. We are God's servants busied in His service throughout a world whose total economy He alone adequately knows and directs. We are God's children roaming familiarly about His home which like children we take to be still more our own, expansive in His smile, shrinking before His frown,

playing the truant, with the innocent and adventurous craft of children, in the hours of sunshine, gathering about His knees for comfort in the hours of darkness and terror. Or again in another mood this world is not good enough for God's owning. And so for us His children it is a foreign land. In spite of all the millionfold repetition of man's birth into it, that birthplace is an accident. Our spirits are not native here. We are in the strictest sense strangers. A divine homesickness haunts the spirit of man with its reviving pain. We are pilgrims along strange and lonely roads, strange for all their familiarity, lonely for all their crowds. They only cease to be lonely when we realise that all our companions are pilgrims too, and that is not so easy of realisation as it ought to be. For the pilgrim-feeling depends so much upon a great and obscure silence. When we talk about it freely we only half feel it. Or again we are ambassadors of God at a foreign court. Or more frequently we are the prodigals in the far country, reduced to the knowledge that we are feeding at the troughs of swine.

Now all this imagery is true and helpful. It keeps us looking out towards God. It helps us to love the world on whose face the smile of God is reflected as a seal and symbol of the distant radiance. It helps us, too, to fear the world for that its visage is marred and wrinkled by the eternal fierceness of the Divine frown. There are in it things too terrible for man to look upon and live, or at any rate to live at the level we feel to be his natural one. And again there are in it hints of things too lovely for him to look upon and live the life he has been accustomed to live. We need to look out and beyond all that is here or ever can be here in order to find God.

And yet are we to say that all the experience of the mystics is utterly false and misleading? And above all are we to say it as Christians, even as the most orthodox of Christians, seeing that mysticism has been one of the most consistent expressions of Christianity throughout its history? And the mystics, remember, are those who have looked almost exclusively within to find God, who have realised Him most conspicuously as the inner light. There are saints, even in the Christian calendar, who, if they were represented worthily, would be represented with deep, peaceful inlooking eyes. They were men, and women too, who had ceased to look out because they had found the outward distracting, who thought they had passed beyond the symbol and all the range of its witness and had penetrated to the reality. And that reality they found within.

Now it may well be that there was something essentially extravagant in their spiritual attitude. It may well be that no soul can ever afford to dispense with the aid of the symbol and remain completely sane and healthy. But none the less it is worth while to try to understand the attitude of such men, and it is all the more worth while that their experience, even if exaggerated, is very like the experience of the ordinary religious soul. That experience may help us to understand what serious men mean when they talk about the immanence of God. They mean, if they have themselves had anything of that experience, that they could never have looked anywhere to find God, either without or within, if some power of God had not already had native possession of them. They mean that God was always beforehand with them, that He had always possessed them in order

that they might be able even to desire to possess Him. They mean that no word of God could ever have reached their souls if there had not already been some word of God within their souls. They mean that every word of God is but the already expected and foreseen answer to a kindred word which questions incessantly and clamorously within. They mean that there could be no symbol anywhere without if something of the reality had not been already within to recognise it as a symbol. They mean that Christ Himself would have come in vain as the fulfilment of the Divine Word if He had not taken thought to lodge beforehand in the hearts of men as at least a word to be fulfilled. They mean what St. Augustine meant by that doctrine of grace for which he fought so jealously and tenaciously as almost to destroy the reality of man's freedom for its sake, the doctrine that man cannot even seek God if God does not already indisputably possess him. They mean, and St. Augustine meant too, in spite of the necessitarian form of his doctrine, that man is only free in the measure that he is possessed by God.

But they mean something more than all this, and St. Paul and St. Augustine, kindred souls and kindred mystics, will help us to the fulness of their meaning. They meant that man was not free, merely in virtue of his creation, but in virtue of his redemption; that he was not free simply because God had separated him from Himself, but because He had so separated him from Himself as still to retain a foothold in that human nature occupying which He could hope to make it a Divine nature. Man is free only because the only really free life, the life of God, is somehow in him and of him, only

because and only in so far as it becomes in him and of him more and more.

Freedom and redemption are but two names for one thing. And the mystic sees, because he has felt, that redemption and freedom are only possible if God is within us, that God cannot gain fuller and fuller possession of a life—and that is redemption—if He has not always had a foothold within it, that He cannot force life but must win it—otherwise we are not free—and that to win it He must have some ally and witness within to greet the first movement of His Spirit, or rather which is itself the first movement of His Spirit. In other words the immanentist believes that creation has already made redemption possible, that God has so created man as to prepare his redemption. That means indeed that man is created in the very image of God, that somehow and on some terms God commits Himself to man in coming to be man, in order that man may be able to seek and find Him.

But when we try to indicate this self-commitment of God by human images, we are bound to suggest something that we do not mean, and that others may quite honestly think we do mean. If we say that a seed of the Divine nature is implanted in us, the image seems to suggest, not indeed an absolute necessity of growth, but a growth which under favouring circumstances will be regular and almost automatic. If we say simply that God is immanent in man, it may be made to imply that God's nature is no greater than man's grown to its height. But let us leave all these inadequate images, and just consider what is implied in the history of a Christian soul—the soul, say, of St. Paul. Something from without stirs it into action, into a kind of action

which we call in the full sense spiritual because it engages all the powers of the soul, the whole range of the spirit's capacity. And in that kind of action the soul feels that it has for the first time come to know itself. And that knowledge always begins as the knowledge of evil, the knowledge of self as evil. There arises the sense of division within, of conflict, of two principles which have joined a truceless battle. The knowledge that the superficial ordinary self in which we have hitherto contentedly lived is evil is accompanied by the blessed experience that there is another unsuspected self which will never again take that ordinary self for granted, which must make war upon it till the latest day. And yet in that battle the victory is never decisively gained, even though its mere continuance is felt at every moment to be a victory for the deeper self, an extended invasion of the deeper self into the territory of the more superficial. And the fiercer the battle grows, the longer it is sustained, the more conscious does the soul become that that higher life has the right to its sole possession, and does actually in some sense solely possess it. And yet at the same time the more conscious too does it become of the terrible and tyrannous power of the lower life. It swings between the agonized cry of helplessness, "Who will deliver me from the body of this death?" and the calm assurance of the confession, "I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me." It boldly says "I live," and yet humbly hopes and resolves: "Not that I have already apprehended, but I strive towards the upward calling of God that I may be apprehended." It has attained God, and yet, when it has attained God as fully as it can, God is still far beyond it, and its culminating hope is that

He will attain it. The conflict which is growth has no term here. Its term is elsewhere, in a nature which is Another, and yet is Another only to fulfil our soul's conflict as its native satisfaction and its destined victory. God is the soul's destiny, the term of its peace and attainment, only because He is from the beginning of beginnings the principle out of which it struggles to attain. In short God would not be transcendent for us if He were not immanent in us. He would not be beyond all our experience if He were not within all our experience. And so when we speak of the immanence of God we do not mean that the human soul is God in His absolute peace that has never needed to know disturbance, in His absolute victory that has never needed to know the weariness and doubt of conflict. We mean that God has somehow condescended to be the soul in its actual experience of incessant restlessness and battle. We might look out for ever in vain if He had not condescended to dwell within as the eye through which we can look out to some purpose. But because He is within, we look out towards Him for ever and see.

XIV.—COMMUNION HUMAN AND DIVINE

"The God of patience and consolation grant, you to be like-minded one towards another, according to Christ Jesus, that ye may with one mind and one mouth glorify God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ."—ROMANS xv., 5.

It is not the stern words of religion that ought to terrify us so much as its tender words. They suggest something exquisite in character which, when we are sincere with ourselves, must be our despair. They are so far removed from anything we know ourselves to be or can honestly hope to become. Here, for instance, is the ideal of communion in worship and the human temper on which it depends, as realised by the soul of St. Paul. How far it is above our ordinary mood at its very best. Worship is perhaps for us not entirely a formal act. We are conscious, perhaps, as we take part in it, of something more than a respectable concession to the claims of a venerable and sacred tradition, of something more than a social duty recognised and discharged. It is at least an accentuation and a quickening of the best features of our habitual character. Such discipline as we have grown accustomed to apply throughout the routine of our ordinary life is stirred into a mood of self-consciousness and deeper purpose. Our souls are vaguely enlarged and exalted as in presence of a greatness towards which they were meant to increase and of a dignity towards which they were meant to ascend. Or

again they are aware of an unwonted submission and rebuke in presence of the same greatness and dignity.

Yet it is all so vague. That is the uncomfortable impression which in the secrecy of troubled hearts we have often to acknowledge. The God whom we worship we worship, for the most part, ignorantly. We may know all that our theology teaches about Him. Our interest in what we call religious questions may be vivid and sincere. The Bible and its teachings may be very familiar, so familiar indeed as to have lost all power of genuine appeal. But what we lack is an immediate knowledge of God which would make the Bible and theology live for us. Indeed, we may say in passing that without such knowledge both the Bible and theology may be a hindrance rather than a help to the religious life. For we shall either be without the critical spirit, and then the Bible and theology will furnish us with conceptions of which we have no measure within, conceptions which will only confound us with their oppressive claims of authority over our souls; or we shall possess the critical sense, and then the things which will strike us most in their teaching are the very things which are likely to be our stone of stumbling and our rock of offence. In order that the Bible and theology may avail for our spiritual upbuilding, we need a critical sense which is not primarily of the intellect at all, a critical sense supplied by a finely-tempered and disciplined spiritual instinct, which will select at once in their teaching what is universal and enduring, what corresponds to the needs of all souls alike and of all souls throughout their full term of possible growth. And that instinct can only be formed by the immediate

knowledge of God, by something in the soul which needs the friendship of God, which needs to give itself to God and to find response from Him as its perfect satisfaction. Ultimately the soul lives only by what we call communion with God. And that is both the condition and the essence of all true worship of Him.

But we must not allow ourselves to be deluded by a phrase. And it is the great merit of St. Paul, and of all great religious souls, that they will not allow us so to delude ourselves. It is true that that knowledge may be born, or seem to be born, into full and immediate consciousness in the soul. But even if it should be so, it is necessary if it is to grow and flourish that it should have some measure in habitual aspects of our character and action. And then for many it is not born into immediate consciousness at all. It emerges slowly into consciousness out of those same habitual aspects of character and action. It is always indeed involved in them from the moment that they begin to control the life and to become the form of its expression. But they may exist in their full force and vigour while that which is the secret of their strength still lies dormant. They may flourish even though they have not yet recognised the magnitude of the Spirit which informs them. How many a life we know whose rich fruitage we can only account for by believing that its roots strike down to those depths where it has union with God. And yet it itself in its active conscious mood doubts of that union or does not dare to claim it. It was not merely the merciful but the righteous judge, the judge that knew the hearts of men, that spoke the word of perfect sanity and justice: "By their fruits ye shall know them."

What then is that type of character and action which affords the measure of the soul's real communion with God? It is just our power of communion with one another. It is our power of being what St. Paul calls like-minded one with another. That power can only grow out of communion with God. When we use that majestic but elusive phrase, we have an actual test of its meaning in the character of life here and now. And the value of that test is that we can study its conditions and assess the measure of its reality. Now, at first sight it might seem as though men were in natural communion with one another on the lower planes of existence only, and as if every upward step but served to shatter and disrupt that natural communion. But I think we shall find that that is a most superficial and untrustworthy view. Are rudimentary societies, held together sometimes throughout long ages by blind instincts and inveterate traditions, instincts and traditions which we rightly characterise as savage—are such societies types of what we mean by human communion, of what we desire when we speak of human brotherhood? Is communion even possible where life is depressed by custom to a mechanical type of duty, where every man is born into his hereditary niche and must occupy it until he dies? Does not the very idea of communion involve an individuality at least so developed that it may be trusted with itself? Can you feel the real individuality of another if you have never been allowed or forced to feel your own? These are questions which we must face if we want to appreciate the conditions under which a real communion of men is possible. For assuredly we are just now tending and, as I believe, tending in virtue of

a true and healthy instinct, towards a more complete regulation of society than we have known in the West for some centuries. And that development involves not only the future of society, but the future of religion which is the life-breath of society. It must, if it is to serve the cause of religion, be a development of social order which will have for its supreme end the release and the nurture of that individuality on which the reality of communion and brotherhood among men depends. I have no doubt that that is its real impulse, that it is, often consciously, sometimes unconsciously, in its spirit and aim a religious movement.

But let us turn aside from all speculation about the future to consider how individuality is in fact the spiritual groundwork of communion. It is easy enough to see how men are welded together into a solid mass by great currents of feeling. But there is nothing more dangerous or more untrustworthy than such feeling if, as often happens, it merely robs men of their individuality, if it merely melts them down into a shapeless spiritual mass. It is from such mob feeling that all the greatest disasters to humanity spring. But think, on the other hand, of the feeling which produces individuality. Think of the feeling which has presided at the birth of every new religious movement, of the feeling, for instance, which nerved Christianity to all its early victories of faith. It was a feeling which could endure in loneliness and isolation, which from the hearts of the poor and the weak despised the threats and defied the pressure of a great world-power, which sustained the weakness of women and children to face the agonies of torture and martyrdom. That was the feeling which made a veritable

communion of saints of the early Christian Church. That was the feeling which made of *the* Communion the symbol and sacrament of a common humanity for which each lived and died, the satisfying worship of God for every member of that Church.

But it is when we pass beyond feeling that we reach that which seems necessarily to divide. At the stage of thought it seems as if human fellowship were impossible. The more real thought is, the more individual it is, the more jealously it must insist on its right to complete autonomy. It seems as though communion in thought were not even an ideal to be aimed at. Yet in fact men have always longed to possess the one truth which would unite them all. And the religious society always claims to be not only a community in feeling, but a community in knowing, a common possession of truth. And just on that account, it has always been the temptation of the religious society to distrust thought, to brand it as arrogance or deceit, to reject it as the natural enemy of the religious life. But if we look a little more closely, we shall see that communion in truth depends upon the individual activity of thought. The quest of the true may lead men at first in different directions. But it is only those for whom that quest is real who can learn from one another, who can recognise how the thought of each, however individual it may be, is a contribution to that which is the common truth of humanity. If the truth could be imposed upon us, it would not be human truth at all, we could have no real communion in it. But the common human truth is that which each man may prove in his own way, and which becomes more true for us, more completely a common possession, just in so

far as each soul has put it individually to the proof. The variety which seemed to divide is the very condition of a real, a growing, a living communion.

Or again, the world of action seems superficially to divide men. Their interests are pledged in different directions, their very capacities seem to become more and more highly specialised with the advance of human civilisation. Sometimes we long for that primitive simplicity in which all men had the same simple interests, and were pledged to the same simple duties. But on reflection we find that such desire is an illusion. It is not there that men find a satisfying community of action. Such community is superficial, untrustworthy, unsatisfying. It is a community in momentary and passing interests. But the communion in that which is permanent and humanly satisfying, the communion in the spiritual basis of all human interests, is only possible where purpose and action have ceased to be merely habitual and have come to be alive and fruitful through individuality.

So it is that religion, whose very essence is communion with God springing out of and in turn expressed through a real communion of human spirits, is never satisfied with making its appeal to the mass, but gains its victories only when it has occupied the innermost citadel of the individual will. We are at times inclined to force a reconciliation of the great antitheses of life by eliminating one of them altogether. Now it is the will of the society which we wish to exalt, to the practical extinction of individual power. Again it is individual power which we are so anxious to recover that we practically nullify the due claims of society over each. Religion is

the one standing witness in human history to the fact that such short-cuts are suicidal ; that the reconciliation which we desire lies in the continuous development of elements that only seem to be opposed, but are, in reality, complementary ; that the communion which is natural to men is the root out of which their true individuality grows ; that only on the various branching of their individuality can the perfected fruit of their communion ripen.

If we would worship God with one mind and one will, we must first have grown into like-mindedness one with another in Jesus Christ. For He is the sacrament of that perfect human communion.

XV.—GOD'S APPREHENSION OF THE SOUL AND THE SOUL'S APPREHENSION OF GOD

"Not that I have already obtained, or am already made perfect: but I press on, it so be that I may apprehend that for which also I was apprehended by Christ Jesus."—
PHILIPPIANS iii., 12.

"Only whereunto we have already attained, by that same rule let us walk."—PHILIPPIANS iii., 16.

We need on this day of our parochial festival* to remind ourselves of the very foundations of our individual and of our common religious life. Can we possibly find a better guide to such reflection than these two contrasted and complementary sayings of St. Paul? Their value lies in the closeness of their neighbourhood, in the natural way in which the one arises out of and supplements the other. It is always so that the great soul feels. For most of us it is enough to catch one phase of truth. We are so enamoured of it or rather of our perception of it that we cannot be satisfied till we have forced it far beyond the point of practical appeal into some region of hard and repellent dogmatism or of vague and nebulous mysticism. But it is the mark of the great souls like St. Paul that, in their very attempt to indicate the practical reach of some truth they have learned, they are compelled to recognise necessities which seem for the moment to run counter to it. They cannot establish one truth

* This sermon was preached on the Feast of the Visitation of the B.V.M.

without enforcing another which seems to abate the significance of the former. So it is that St. Paul cannot impress upon his converts the duty of bearing one another's burdens without being constrained by the largeness and sanity of his view of life to remind them in the same breath that every man must bear his own burden. So it is again that he cannot state what he recognises to be the essential character of the religious life, its incompleteness, its need of perpetual effort after that completeness which belongs to God's apprehension of us and not to our apprehension of Him—that he cannot, I say, state this without at the same time insisting on the necessity of so resting in what we have attained as to make it the constant rule and inspiration of our actual everyday conduct.

Let us see how closely these two aspects of practical truth hang together. Let us reflect how together they constitute the basis of our religious life. And, first of all, religion is not conformity, but attainment. Or if you like to describe it as conformity, remember at least that it is a conformity which is only possible as an attainment. For it is a conformity to the will of God. Its object is something towards which we must strive with the whole force of our being. And as a rule we think of conformity as something that is easy and immediately attainable, as an agreement with something that is on or even below our ordinary spiritual level. We conform to a law which is but the register of our own present attainment.

But religion is satisfied with no such conformity. The law to which it desires our adhesion is not given in any formal code. It is given in the very character of

God, in the love by which He has apprehended us. Religion calls us to apprehend, to gain increasing personal possession of that very spirit of love by which God eternally apprehends us. Its feeblest impulse and its most perfect achievement are alike rooted in that faith by which we realise the necessary forthcoming of God towards us. There is no difference in the essential character of the religion of the humblest sinner who for the first time feebly gropes towards God, and of the greatest saint who seems to us to adhere victoriously and indefeasibly to His will. For the one and the other religion is the effort—which will never be crowned with complete success, or rather whose perfect success and satisfaction lie in the effort itself—to apprehend that which never could be apprehended at all were it not that it is always apprehending us.

Religion has two aspects, and from whichever of them we think of it it equalises us. It is the love of God coming out to us all alike, finding its familiar home in the common heart of man, seeking its particular foothold in the varying character of each, keeping its hope alive in some special capacity in each of us which we may have ourselves forgotten or neglected, which others may fail altogether to recognise. But that love divinely striving to apprehend each separate soul is the very substance of our humanity, and in the generous light of its unceasing faith in us all our differences are transformed into a felt equality. To know God, to feel the eternal Love that apprehends us all, is necessarily to love the brethren, to feel the essential equality that works through even our greatest differences, and can compel them all to some common result of good.

But again religion has another aspect. It is the answer of each soul to this supreme apprehension of the Divine Love. There is its human side, marked by such strange and perplexing diversity not only of attainment, but of the very attempt to attain. And yet here, too, it makes us all equal. The greatest saint has never claimed spiritual precedence of the weakest and grossest sinner. Nay, it is just the saint who, having learned the hardness and yet the infinite satisfaction of the least attainment, yet believes in the hope of attainment for all, believes that God is so near to all that none can fail entirely to reach, through whatever dread vistas of ultimate experience, some satisfying sense of that nearness. Here again, here especially, in this aspect of religion as the unceasing effort of man to attain, to apprehend that by which he is apprehended, it makes us and keeps us equal. Too often the temptation comes to us to convert our religion into an instrument of spiritual severance, to draw a clear line of division between the Church and the world, to mark off a hierarchy of spiritual orders and values. We think that in doing so we are only recognising obvious facts. We pride ourselves upon our sincerity in avoiding the confusion of values which only an insincere and hypocritical humility could suggest. Nothing is clearer, we think, than that we are better than other men. God Himself must know that there are differences, and it is but paltering with the facts of which He is well aware to pretend that there are none. Well, it is true that there are differences. And yet it is true also that it is just to these differences that the religious soul, the soul which sees the facts of life in their real and eternal significance, will attach least importance. We

are sure that never was religious insight more abundantly manifest than in a certain parable of the Pharisee and the Publican which has never ceased to utter its sublime truth in the heart of every sincere soul that has listened to it. In spite of apparent fact, we still feel that truth lies with the soul which is humble enough in the presence of God to feel that it can claim no superiority, that before the Infinite Goodness all finite attainments or efforts after attainment are equal. Religion is the opening and the uplifting of the heart, and no open or uplifted heart knows anything of an ultimate superiority.

But again we may easily force this view of religion as the effort to attain to the point of unreality and self-deception. We need to prove what we have attained. We need to be on our guard against the dangers of a certain looseness of growth which is characteristic of all life at certain moments. We all know the kind of dangers to which the physical life is exposed in youth, in its period of early and instinctive expansion. The body is, as we say, growing beyond its strength. Or again, we know how the mind in its youthful eagerness absorbs far more than it can assimilate, and has often to suffer from its inability to digest what it has received. So too it may be, and often is, with the life of the soul in its effort to apprehend the ways of God. There are times when the human soul is tyrannically possessed by the desire to know. A kind of loose speculative mood dominates our spirits. New vistas of apprehension open out before us, intoxicating in the seductive magic of their beauty and attractiveness. It is just at such times that we need carefully to prove the new knowledge, to convert it into tried and living power. "Whereunto we have already

attained, by the same rule let us walk." That is a word of true wisdom. It was wrung from a soul which had faced the realities of its own nature, which was pre-eminently possessed by the desire to apprehend and yet had learned that every stage of apprehension needed to make sure of itself as a proved and trustworthy rule of common action. That proof of the soul's apprehension is one of the most abiding and useful functions of every religious society. We might so easily lose ourselves in mere abandonment to the soul's loose and vague speculation. We need to be brought to the test of a common duty, to have our new apprehension of God transformed into a general rule of life. Whitman was right when he spoke of the divineness of the average. Every outstanding victory of the soul, every instance of its individual insight and apprehension, can be translated and, if it is to be of real and permanent value, must be translated into a rule by which all may walk. And not till this translation has been effected do we possess the new truth at all.

Let then these complementary aspects of religion be the inspiration of our Church life—on the one hand an openness of the soul to apprehend the ways of God ever more fully, to seek as knowing that we have not yet and never can fully apprehend that which has apprehended us, and on the other an earnest concentration of the will upon translating into a common rule of life for us all that which we may have already apprehended. So must the individual always be proved and merged in the social to the continual upbuilding of the true Church of God.

XVI.—STEWARDS OF GOD

“It is required in stewards that a man be found faithful.”—
1 CORINTHIANS iv., 2.

There is perhaps no conception which so completely sums up the various aspects of Christian duty as that of stewardship. There are few images to indicate the nature of service which have not at some time or other been used in describing man's relation to God, and each of them no doubt has had some special fitness of its own. The servant obeying the behests of the master, the child learning through the discipline of the home, the apprenticeship to a life of service which will open out hereafter, the probation which prepares for a future judgment, these are some of the images which man has used to describe the character of his religious life. But they are all of them inadequate. They suggest too much or too little. They none of them convey either the full dignity or the full responsibility of the position in which God has placed us, of the task which He has committed to us. It is the image of stewardship alone that brings home to us the reality of our position.

Let us think of what is involved in that image. And first of all we are living agents in a world of life. On every hand a great living world presses in upon us. From the beginning of time unnumbered forces have been at work to make the living order of which we are a part. Of all that tradition of life nothing

has been lost. Every generation enters into the heritage of all the past, and when it in turn is ready to incorporate itself with the past leaves an enlarged and deepened heritage to the generation which succeeds it. We seem but the merest results of this vast living movement from which we come. It has spent itself in making us. Everything that we are, that we think, that we do, seems determined by that long effort of the past. It is within us, and about us. We cannot escape it. We have only what it has become in us to work with. Its influence from without is the one force which determines the nature and direction of our work. It seems at first sight as if we were the born thralls of this eternal living force which moves onward to its destiny through and over our unregarded souls. There are even those who would find in such a view the solution to the riddle of life.

But it is a solution as unintelligent as it is hopeless. For let us think how this living force which inhabits and encompasses us really affects us. We shall see, I think, that instead of forcing us to be its slaves, it never has its satisfying way with us until it makes us free. If it provokes us to action, it demands that that action shall be deliberate, reasoned, judicious. No automatic repetition of a mere process will satisfy it. It claims from each of us the slow and patient labour of reflection, the close and careful scrutiny of the methods of its own action, of its methods of action in ourselves, of its methods of action in the world without. It calls upon us to act in order that we may know, and again to know in order that we may act more perfectly. If we were its slaves we could not make mistakes, we could only blindly register its will, unconscious of the possibility of a

better or a worse. But we can only serve it aright, we can only learn, and that gradually, its will through our mistakes, through that anxious looking before and after which doubts of the rightness of what has been, and hopes for the rightness of what is to be. Its challenge to us to be ourselves seems at times to be so absolute that we may almost forget its existence and its claims upon us. It seems to have laboured through endless ages only that each of us may become himself and assert himself through an unlimited freedom. Doctrines of the "Superman" are not of this age alone. They are even more recurrent in human history than doctrines of absolute determinism, of our entire subjugation to the blind will of life. And false and even monstrous as such doctrines are, they are probably less dangerous and more in accord with the truth of things than any doctrine of religious or philosophic fatalism. They are at least a witness to the truth which life is always trying to enforce, the truth of human freedom.

Now all this, translated into religious terms, brings us back to the great conception of our stewardship. God governs the world through us whom He has appointed as His stewards. And first of all let us remember that we *are* His stewards. We are not here to make ourselves easy and comfortable in the world, to manipulate the world, or that part of it over which we have some control, till it has become easy and comfortable for us. We are here to take up the world's work where we find it, and to carry it on. And that work is always spiritual. It is the redemption of life. It is the deliverance of life from the mere slavery to a mechanical habit into the freedom of new and hitherto untried endeavour. Each fresh

generation of men is here to bring a new hope and courage into the heart of life, to try new methods in the accomplishment of an unending task, to keep the life-current that runs in the world's veins fresh and pure. It is imagination, a sane and practical imagination, that makes religion. If we could only realise what we have inherited, the grandeur and dignity of the treasure that has been committed to us, we dare not gamble it away in a mood of selfish frivolity. We should find our utmost satisfaction and reward in the heightened value which it had been given to us to extract from our heritage. We should find our utmost shame and reproach in the loss or degradation which it had suffered at our hands. We should learn the spiritual secret of even the meanest toil.

I do not speak lightly of a power that most assuredly cannot be lightly gained. But few of us perhaps are capable of enduring even with patience mere routine work, the work that makes no claim upon those powers within us whose exercise is their own satisfaction, the work that only tires the body and stupefies the mind. And yet the sense of stewardship has ennobled even work of that kind, and does ennoble it to-day. We all of us know souls, and it is our own reproof and judgment to know them, which keep their brightness and their purity and their sunny patience through a whole lifetime of work of that kind. It is their religion which has touched their imagination to the vision of truth. They do not quarrel with the accident that has set them to humble and naturally repellent tasks. They do not even admit that it is an accident. They feel quite simply and naturally that there is their appointed stewardship, that there is the field in which God has called them to labour.

And are they not perhaps right? May it not well be that God does desire that those who have learned to sacrifice most gladly should find their appointed labour where the greatest sacrifice is demanded? May it not be that in some more spiritually developed future, some future in which men will have more generally penetrated to the spiritual secrets of service, the unpleasant duties of life will not be forced upon the class which is most economically helpless, but will be accepted by the class which is most spiritually developed? And remember that is not merely an insane prophecy. It is at least in some measure a record of actual history than which there can be nothing more sane. For monasticism in its most vital period had achieved exactly this dream, and transformed the humblest and most exacting forms of physical labour into an ally and expression of the spiritual life. It is indeed not a mad dream at all. It is an expression of the soundest and healthiest instinct. Specialisation is no doubt a natural and inevitable development of every complex civilisation. But it may be doubted whether specialisation does not to some degree impair the largeness and fulness of our sense of stewardship, and whether a great religious revival will not in some, perhaps in very large, measure correct the growing tendency to it, and force us back into simpler and more general interests and duties.

But again our stewardship in this world is declared by the very fact and method of progress. What religion needs to do most of all to-day is to claim the method of progress as one of the great revelations which it has received from God. We talk as if progress were something automatic, or again as if it were a mere advance in

material development, a mere increase of material possession. But we forget that every increase of material possession is itself a manifestation of spiritual mastery. It is the result of some long and patient effort to know. Behind all the triumphs of mechanical invention, there lies the splendid daring of the solitary thinker. We have made the world-forces our familiar slaves, our real household servants, to-day because yesterday some eager mind had faith enough to believe that the world was an order, some unexplored secret of which he had been set to penetrate. In our lazy habitual mood we think we reverence the world and its Maker by insisting upon its inexplicableness. It is that part of its order which we have not yet been able to explore that we call miraculous. But the mind that knows itself to be God's steward finds the miracle in that secret of order which it has been able to surprise. The miracle lies in the new knowledge, the new power, which we actively acquire, not in the old customs which we passively endure. The miracle-worker is the man who has realised that he is the steward of God sent to develop a property which, without him, must lie fallow, its riches annulled because no man will believe in them and find them. To accept the world as we find it is to deny both its worth and our own dignity. To believe that there is a life hidden in it which needs our life to call it forth into beneficent activity, is to discover both its greatness and our own. That is our stewardship to which all progress is the unceasing witness and appeal.

And the supreme virtue of the steward is faithfulness. He of all men cannot be satisfied with a mere wilful energy. He must be true to the facts. He must be content to be taught of God, who is the living Spirit of

all fact, who is the supreme result to which all fact is growing. He must root himself in fact in order that he may grow on into the fuller spiritual fact, in order that the spiritual fact into which he grows may become an integral part of the world's ordinary life, a living heritage through which the world may live more fully. The loyalty of faith is no mere passive submission, but a sure and steadfast growth. It does not rest in the seen and known, but presses on for ever towards the unseen and as yet unknown. It alone feels the greatness towards which it goes because it alone feels the greatness from which it comes. And again it is because it looks habitually to the rock whence it is hewn that, when hewn, it is fitted to be a living stone in the eternal temple. We are God's stewards. That is our dignity and our inspiration. It is only those that recognise their life as stewardship who can be faithful to their Master, faithful in their service. The recognition may be implicit merely; it will yet issue in true service. But it is when it becomes explicit that our service is inspired, and can submit itself in holy fear to the loving scrutiny of that judgment which is eternal.

XVII.—THE RELIGIOUS SIGNIFICANCE OF THE PRESENT

“Behold, now is the day of salvation.”—

2 CORINTHIANS, vi., 2.

That is a phrase which reveals the characteristic attitude of the religious soul. For him the promises of God have their point of reference in his own moment, in the time and the circumstances over which alone he has control. He turns to the Sacred Scriptures of the past, to the records of man's faith and of God's faithfulness, and he finds in them the sure prophecy which is being fulfilled in his own passing hour. For the religious mood history has practically no existence. Its faith but repeats and incorporates in one present inclusive act all the certainties to which faith has witnessed in the past.

Now there is unquestionably a danger in this inevitable attitude of the religious spirit, and it is well that we should face it. In order that we may see how this attitude is legitimate and necessary, nay, how without it religion cannot be, we must first try to liberate it from certain entanglements which its very existence makes it difficult for it to avoid. The entanglements of which I speak are exactly historical entanglements. The danger to which I have referred is that history, in spite of faith, exists, and will sometimes take its revenge upon a faith which ignores it. Let me try to suggest more definitely what I mean. And I will make the attempt by taking the case

of our own Sacred Scriptures. You all know how till quite recently the whole Christian world regarded those Scriptures as speaking to us throughout their whole extent with one consentient voice, as announcing in all their parts a uniform message which had for us exactly the same kind and degree of authority as they had for those to whom they were originally addressed. Now there was something so essentially true in this way of regarding the Scripture message that, however much we may modify it in the future or have already modified it, we cannot afford to lose touch with it altogether. What such a view witnesses to is that man's faith in God, in an eternal Perfection for which he is and towards which he is striving and in which alone he can find his satisfaction, has a single inspiration. We believe in God because God has constituted us to believe in Him, and every definite act of belief in Him is a unique and original expression of the same Divine inspiration. The feeblest savage groping after God has no lesser source than the most perfect life of saintship. And not only is the Divine inspiration which lies behind all human faith the same, but the human quality which receives that inspiration is also in large measure the same. It is the same life of aspiration, of reverence, of good will which in all men goes out to seek, and therefore surely finds, the Divine.

Yet, when all this is said and duly remembered, how different the forms under which aspiration and reverence and good-will declare themselves. How different is the expression of these feelings in the untrained and savage nature and in the more matured life which has entered into the heritage of a long religious civilisation. How different, for instance, their expression in the Israelitish

nationality as we know it from the book of Judges and of the Kings from their expression in the same nationality purified and ennobled by the long suffering of the Exile ! And again where is a stronger and more assured faith in the God of righteousness, in the absolutely righteous Judge, to be found in the whole history of religion than in the authentic prophecies of Isaiah ? Yet it is not difficult to see that the writings of the Maccabean period witness to a faith that has widened and deepened its conception of the true nature of God.

In other words, faith has its own history, and the faith of to-day loses immeasurably by ignoring that history. To shut our eyes to the obvious fact of God's gradual education of the race, virtually to deny that there has been such a thing as a slow and gradual process of religious civilisation, is to obscure for ourselves an essential element in God's revelation of Himself to us. He reveals Himself to us as much perhaps in the unregarded and unchronicled processes by which a civilisation, almost without knowing it itself, absorbs and makes its own larger ideas of justice and truth, as in the outstanding and prophetic souls which have heralded those ideas.

But it is not merely by ignoring the fact that faith has a history that we are in danger of missing the full value of the Bible's spiritual treasure. We may miss it as well by unconsciously enslaving ourselves to the religious experience of the past. That is the real danger of forgetting what history has undoubtedly meant for religion. In denying history we become its slave. We have no hope in the present save what by a spurious kind of spiritual archæology we can extract from the past. We

have no vital and natural ties, we deny the present which we know by every living instinct that stirs within us and evacuate it of all religious significance, we refuse to obey or even to recognise the religious impulses with which it is fraught. And the result is that we make our religion an act of paralysing despair instead of an act of invigorating and vitalising hope. If you want to see how disastrously successful such an act of spiritual defiance of all the living forces of one's own time can be, read a book called "Father and Son" which, though it savours of a past age, may represent a tragedy still being enacted in some strict religious household of the old-fashioned sort.

Against all this puny fear of the present the religion of the great souls is a constant witness. For them all the past at its highest is but a prophecy of this present hour. They read out of the records of souls long gone from among us the announcement of the accepted time, of the day of salvation. And they are sure that that announcement will have its fulfilment for them to-day. Here or nowhere, now or nowhen, is our day of salvation. Here in this day the forces of God are active. The eternal Justice is at work in the confused turmoil of the popular conscience. The eternal Truth is working in and through our confused search of truth. We are not artificially isolated from all the spiritual experience of the past so that we must get out of our own skins and become a kind of spiritual spectres in order to go in search of it. That experience is in us and of us. It may be lying in us latent, unused, or the best part of it may be; but it is there, it constitutes us. We must suffer from its failure. We may profit by its success. But ~~we~~.

shall profit by it only as we turn it to account in this new world in which we are. There is no other world for us. Here we must find God's opportunities, or we shall not find them at all.

And yet, you will say, has it not been just as much the mark of the religious soul that it has sought refuge in the past, or hurried on to greet its hope in the future? It is true. There is an instinct in us for fulfilment. We want to see the end at which we aim accomplished. And there are two ways in which our imagination tends to represent that accomplishment. We find it in the saintly and heroic lives of the past or we project it into some future perfection. But the power by which imagination works in us most fruitfully to this result is, though we know it not, a trust in the living present. The present is not fulfilment. If it were, it would not be the day of salvation. It is just in so far as we accept it as fulfilment that it becomes dead to us, that in turn it deadens us, that it becomes to us the day of destruction. No, we trust the present when we can find in it all the motives of action, of hope, of infinite endeavour. It is God's opportunity for us because it is charged with imperfections which awake our desire of perfection and our power of seeking it, because it yawns with voids which call upon us to fill them, because out of the depths its need cries to us till we must hear.

Think of it; we could never know God if we were already perfect. We could never hear His voice if we were not surrounded by the atmosphere of infinite need through which alone it can ring clear and true. The present is always confused, but it is through its confusion that we attain the hope and the certainty of order. It is

always dark, but in its darkness there is always the promise of light. It always seems to us a formless void, but it is in that void alone that we feel the shaping presence of the Spirit of God. It is through this disappointing, refractory, unsatisfactory present that we have really learned to feel the inspiration of the past, and to hear the call of the future. The best that has been, the best that will be, they are ours because here and now we are seeking the best. And we would not be seeking that best at all if for us its promise did not lie in this imperfect that is.

Action is the true word of life, and contemplation only in so far as it ministers to action. We are not made to enjoy, but to strive and to find our joy in the strife, not to attain, but to seek and to find the only satisfying attainment in the quest. Man's gains are of the soul, of the character, and they are achieved in a perpetual endeavour. We enter into every land of promise only to find that it points on to some other land which we must go forth to occupy. The present never satisfies, and just because it does not satisfy it drives us on with hopeful and uplifted hearts towards the eternal satisfaction. If we could rest in it, we should never know God, we should never know what our salvation means. It is because, if we are true to our best selves, it will not let us rest that it is indeed the day of our salvation. It is when we have fearlessly recognised how alone it can be the day of our salvation that we have at last laid hold upon life. Then we shall know that our most oppressive gloom is but the "shade of His hand outstretched caressingly."

XVIII.—THE METHOD OF REDEMPTION

“According to the working whereby He is able even to subdue all things unto Himself.”—PHILIPPIANS iii., 21.

That is the expression of St. Paul's religious hope. There is a perfect Power operative wherever life is, which is able to bring every manifestation of it into subjection to Itself. And that perfect Power is a perfect Love, so that in bringing all things into subjection to Itself It will bring them also into possession of their best selves, It will give them fulfilment of what It had intended them to be. In other words, the constraining purpose of the universe is a purpose of redemption.

Now we know that for St. Paul that Power, that God of redeeming Love, had expressed the full measure of His purpose in Jesus Christ. And we know, too, that for St. Paul the realisation of that purpose in Jesus Christ had been achieved, not through anything wrought during His life on earth, but exactly by His death, by the apparent extinction of all hopes from His earthly life. It was that death which had led to His resurrection, and to the promise of resurrection for all that was of enduring worth in life through Him, to the assurance indeed that through Him all things that had life had gained an enduring worth. That was St. Paul's doctrine of the Divine redemption of the world.

Let us think this morning what it means. The life of Jesus Christ was the life of an ordinary Hebrew prophet,

Like every prophet, He felt the call to utter a great message, an immediate word of God to His own generation. That message burned into His soul during long years of active work and of silent self-communing. His message was not indeed new. It had been the haunting hope of Israel any time for three hundred years. Nevertheless it came with a new force from His lips. It was no echo of tradition as it fell on the ears of the multitude. The Scribes and Pharisees, too, were testifying continually of the Kingdom of Heaven. But when He proclaimed that the Kingdom of Heaven was at hand, it seemed to the multitudes a new word. He spoke it with authority, and not as the Scribes and Pharisees. Yet He did nothing but prepare the hearts of men, quietly, patiently, without spiritual turmoil or revolution, for a worthy entrance into that Kingdom. He prayed and preached in His continual wanderings from city to city of Galilee. He organised a band of preachers to deliver the same message. Finally, He carried His prophetic message into Jerusalem itself, and there, at a single blow, He was struck down by the strong hand of religious orthodoxy. There seemed to be an end of the mission which was to have redeemed Israel. But there was far from being an end of it. In a few years, the sincere and ardent soul of a young Pharisee had found, not in the mission itself which had survived its initiator, but in the very life which had been struck down in the prosecution of that mission, in that life made eternal through intimate and unchanging union with the life of God, the promise and even the ideal accomplishment of the redemption, not of Israel only, but of the whole race of mankind. For St. Paul the full redeeming power of God, the

universal redeeming purpose of God, were witnessed to in the vision of the Risen Christ vouchsafed to his soaring and triumphant faith. The spirit of Christ had become the eternal well-spring in the thirsty land through which man's pilgrimage lay, the source of the increasing river of Divine redemption for men. The life of Christ, triumphant and immutable in its possession of itself, was henceforward the Divine nucleus, the incorporating life-centre round which all the redemptive forces of humanity should grow.

That vision of St. Paul's, of Christ as the risen Lord and Master of all the redeeming powers of life, was a great triumph of faith. And I think it is only in the measure that that faith is possible for us in our own time and through our own experience that we can at all enter into St. Paul's faith. If our own faith cannot see the same process repeating itself now, we shall not really, in spite of our formal beliefs, see it as it was accomplished long ago through the death of Jesus. And the first thing we shall have to learn about that faith is that it is not easy of acquirement, that it does not come to us as if by some process of magic, that it is the result of a long effort of the soul to be true to its highest intuitions. If we take that vision of the risen Christ to St. Paul to have been a work of supernatural magic, to have been forced upon him apart from his will and consent, then we are robbing all religious experience of any meaning or of any value. We can see nothing without for which we have not already been prepared within, nay which we have not already seen or at least felt within. It is true that we are often only half-conscious of what is going on within, that we cannot see clearly the meaning of the

secret trouble to which we are a prey, that we cannot disentangle the hopes from the environing fears, that the darkest moment in our soul's night is often the moment that precedes the unheralded dawn. And it is also true that that dawn of the day in our souls may be precipitated by some quite unexpected and unlikely event in the world of outer happenings. Yet it is also true that we cannot see without what has not already been within. Our eyes may look upon the outer world, but they will see in it only what the soul has prepared itself to see, what it has been seeking to behold.

There is no greater denial of the ways of God than that belief in the possibility of forcing a soul from without, of revealing to it something that had not already been revealed in it or was not at any rate already far on the way to being revealed in it. St. Paul saw Jesus on the Damascus road because he could no longer resist that longing of his soul for what Jesus could be to him which had been growing up silently and all against the grain of his traditional religious training and even feeling ever since the day on which he beheld the sublime faith in his Master of the martyred Stephen. He had chosen no doubt to go to Damascus on that persecuting mission, as is the custom with all of us on like occasions, just that he might harden himself against the doubts in his old faith which were gnawing at his soul with their teeth of fire. There are none so intolerant as those who are wavering in an old faith or those who are not yet quite sure of the new, and that not because they are heartless, but because their one need is of certainty and nothing can give them certainty so satisfyingly as the knowledge that they are burning their boats, that they are

committing themselves finally and irrevocably. So we clinch our purposes of despair with the violence that stuns our consciences into paralysis and lethargy. It was such a blind impulse that had driven Paul from Jerusalem, that had carried him thus far on the Damascus road. But he was too great to accomplish the infamy. He could not kick against the pricks, against that goad in his soul which every time it urged revealed to him the transfigured face of Stephen and recalled the words of his death agony—"Lord J  sus, receive my spirit. Lay not this sin to their charge." And so, within an ace of the purpose he cannot be false enough to himself to accomplish, within sight of the shining walls of the northern city, he breaks down abashed and blinded by excess of light, but with the faith against which he had fought at last triumphant in the glad submissiveness of his soul. And, we may add, to conclude this episode in the history of a soul, like a sensible man, like the man of self-knowledge that he was, he did not trust himself to the enthusiasm of that first hour of relief, but departed into the desert to prove and establish himself through three years of silent communing with the truth which had been revealed in him.

So then the faith which can see the redeeming power of God does not come by some outward chance, neither does it come by some vivid momentary emotion. Either of these things may be the occasion of its realising itself. But it has been already there, in the steady set of the soul towards that vision, in the long-working desire to behold it. However confused and unconscious it may have been, there has been a faith that life was meaningless if there was not somewhere in its very texture a

Divine power working to redeem it. No mere rigid moralism like that of the Pharisee will satisfy such a faith, nor any belief in a Divine promise of long ago which it has simply to believe in as a thing to be accomplished some time or other by some unintelligible act of magic. No, the only thing that will satisfy is the vision of an actual redemptive process going on in human life here and now and an actual redemptive power equal to its gradual accomplishment. That was what St. Paul saw in Jesus. And that is what we must see here in our own day if we are to have St. Paul's faith in Christ. And if we have been preparing ourselves like St. Paul by the sincerity of our desire to see that vision, if we cut ourselves off more and more from satisfaction with the mere formal side of religion, if we listen to that insistent voice of conscience which tells us that religion cannot be magic, that its seed cannot stir into life in us until the soil has been ploughed by the keen edge of sincerity and harrowed by honest self-questioning, until it has become impossible for us to be satisfied with living the life of chance desires and a great constraint is on us to live at all costs for the best self, for God—then like St. Paul we shall see the vision here and now. And we shall see it where he saw it, in the lives that are content to live and die for the best they see and know, in the lives that look not for reward because they find their real reward in living well, in the lives that can pour themselves out ungrudgingly for the sake of others through their mere love of and interest in their fellow men. They may seem to fail, such souls. Half the work of which they dreamed may never be accomplished. Their fellow men may not have understood them, may have even misunderstood and

persecuted them. Even those for whom they lived and who were ready yesterday to acclaim them as saints may in some revulsion of the popular mood be ready to join the crowd that will stone them to-morrow. They may die as martyrs to the high duty to which they have pledged themselves, martyrs of mercy, martyrs of truth, martyrs of goodness. But whatever their temporal fate, they are redeeming the world to-day. They are sharers in the eternal work and spirit of Christ. It is through them that we most surely know Him. Even if they cannot name His name, even if they cannot say "Lord, Lord," they are yet His sworn brothers; for they are, like Him, doing the redemptive will of His Father which is in heaven.

Is it not so? Does it not leap to the eyes in every hour of pause or reflection? A kind of hopeless gloom has settled upon your soul through your commerce with the world of men. Wickedness indeed no longer stalks the earth with defiant mien and hands red with violence and blood. But selfishness, the root of all wickedness, has settled down comfortably to the possession of the earth. It has made its terms with the easy claims of a superficial kindliness. It does everything that is respectable, contributes its big subscriptions to the charities that are most in the public eye, flaunts its largesse in the face of an admiring world, professes its respect, perhaps feels it, for all the popular gods. The vulgarity of the whole thing offends you. You see the high endeavour belittled, dismissed with an easy gesture of contemptuous amusement. You see the high motive rebuked with a sceptical stare, smiled out of court with a cynical disbelief. You see the self-satisfied inherit the earth,

and becoming every day more self-satisfied through their more assured enjoyment of the inheritance. You still believe indeed in good. But you can no longer believe in the victory of the good, save through some cataclysmic judgment which will utterly consume all this cynical soullessness. And then one day you lift up your eyes and you see some simple life that cares for none of these things, that is hardly aware of them, that has not even time to condemn others so busied is it with doing justice and loving mercy and walking humbly with its God. Or you see some little band of men, with uplifted hearts and unconquerable faith and faces set in the rapt ardour of combat and banners rent but still flying in the high wind of God, fighting inch by inch the hosts of fate, stemming that fearful downward plunge of the armies of blind passionate instinct. And lo! even while you look a change has come upon the face of the world. It has seen upon those faces, so much against its will, the light of the eternal Christ. It cowers away into the shadow, smitten with the terrible fear of itself. The rebuker has been rebuked. The unworthiness of the low motive and the selfish life has been revealed. Already the work of self-judgment, which is the work of redemption, has begun.

Lift up your hearts, for your redemption draweth nigh. It draweth nigh in every increase of your faith in the things that are worthy. It was through Christ's high faithfulness, not through something that He accomplished, but through something that He was, that He redeemed the world, that He revealed to it the redemptive forces inherent in itself, that He gave it hope and power to turn them to account. And the hope and

faith to which He has called us are the hope and faith that we can be fellow workers with Him in His own work of redemption; that by our faithfulness, and by that alone, we can lead the world to judge itself and to learn the joy of seeking in all simplicity the things that are worthy and of good report. He has called us to bear the cross, because the cross borne with joy is the one means of the world's redemption. He has called us, in the sublime audacity of expression of one of the greatest spiritual teachers of our time, one whose insight into the things of the Spirit is unsurpassed for its keenness and veracity, to give our own body and blood for many for the remission of sins.

XIX.—SALVATION A QUALITY OF LIFE

"For now is our salvation nearer than when we believed."—
ROMANS xiii., 11.

Every word of religion implies two things, an ideal to which we would reach and the power by which we strive to reach it. And the ideal is no doubt suggested by the mere instinctive effort of the power, just as the power would ebb away into impotence if it could lose sight of the ideal. It is so with the word "salvation." Let us take the word as it comes to us here in the language of St. Paul. It means security, the soul's security. Now of course the first and most obvious implication of this idea of the soul's security is that the soul has some distinctive knowledge of its own danger. There must be some instinct in life which feels towards its right character, which keeps it continually aware of the kind of things that may prove hostile to its true growth. And that instinct must be prior to all actual experience of such hostility, or at least it must declare itself in the earliest and simplest phases of experience, and experience can only develop it and give it more certainty of where danger may lie and how great it is likely to be. We could never have dreamed of security if we had not been aroused to the sense of danger. We could not preserve the ideal of security if we were not continually menaced by dangers. Even for the life of the body this is so, but it is still more true of the inner life. For there the

dangers lurk within its own constitution, as indeed they do also, if in a less degree, in the case of our bodily life. The dangers of which the inner life becomes aware by an instinct which is its self-saving quality are the dangers of what it may itself become. In short, the soul like the body has a grand instinct of health. Like every instinct it needs to be developed by individual experience, it needs to be educated by the best experience of others. There is an instinct of bodily health in the child, but it needs to be cultivated by the experience of what agrees with the physical constitution and what disagrees in order to become the developed instinct of the ordinary man or woman. And that developed instinct is still further capable of wise guidance and direction from the fund of experience whose lessons the professional physician has mastered. So it is with the inner life. There is in us all, in however undeveloped a stage, an instinct for what is morally healthy. We may remain moral children, and then that instinct will remain undeveloped, or worse still will become atrophied by unnatural disuse. But if we make any honest attempt to increase in moral stature, our instinct will grow surer and more sure. We shall feel more and more immediately what it is right for us to do or be, we shall learn to discriminate with increasing certainty between the healthy condition of the inner life and the unhealthy. More than that, we shall acquire a growing power of learning from the best experience of others, of recognising the health-giving food of the inner life and detecting its poison.

But what I wish now chiefly to insist on is that we have an instinct of spiritual health, which is the same

thing as saying that we have an instinct of the dangers that lurk within to menace that health. And this instinct is the root of that power which enables us to labour for the soul's security, which indeed sets us on conceiving of security as the ideal of the inner life. But there are two ways in which this instinct may reveal its power. It may urge us to avoid dangers, or to face and overcome them. Now what I wish to say is that we cannot avoid dangers, that to attempt to avoid them is to blind ourselves to the conditions and even to the nature of real living. I do not indeed mean that there are no dangers which we may not avoid, that there are none which it may not be our highest duty to avoid if it be possible. There is a prudence in battle which is the highest form of courage, which indeed is only likely to exist where there is the greatest courage. It is only the complete self-possession in critical circumstances which comes of courage that can discriminate between the dangers which may be avoided and those which must be faced. And assuredly there are dangers to the inner life from which every prudent man will flee. The cutting off of the right hand or the plucking out of the right eye may be a heroic necessity, of which indeed only the heroic are likely to be capable.

But there are dangers which cannot be avoided. To avoid them, even to try to avoid them, would be to lose life, not to save it. The one chance of life for all of us is to recognise danger when it assails us and recognising to face and conquer it. Even if we do not appear to succeed, resistance itself is success. The defeats of life are not irreparable. The only irreparable thing in life is the cowardice that shirks the combat, or the spiritual

dulness which does not see where it is necessary. But to fight on through a thousand seeming defeats is victory. It is this that gives the soul its sense of security, the nerve and the vigour of robust health. You see the soul that seems to move gladly and serenely along the path of duty. Difficulties seem to yield readily before the quick deliberateness of its advance. There is apparently for it none of that disturbance and opposition which we know so well in ourselves. Before it, as if by magic, the crooked becomes straight and the rough places plain. But that power has not been so easily acquired, nor that security gained in a day. They have been wrought, they are being wrought even now, out of the repeated conflict of the inner life. Every power of the soul has been a conquest. Patience has been wrung out of the tangle and confusion of a thousand temptations to impatience. It was only an incessant watchfulness that could have slain the many-headed hydra of selfishness, and that tireless watch is the unselfishness which fronts you so serenely to-day.

So it is that strength is always gained. The only security of the soul is its power of possessing and directing itself, and that power is the long result of its conflict with all its own lower tendencies. The enemy is within, as the intelligence which recognises him as an enemy and the power which can resist him are within. And this enemy is, in the last resort, notwithstanding the many forms under which it may assail us, one. It is the tendency to ease, to self-satisfaction, the tendency not to struggle upwards. The soul would choose the line of least resistance. But there is something in it that tells it that that is not its life, but its death. Its very life calls

it to the high ventures, to the joy of battle, to the effort after the unattainable. And in that effort it does attain something of which it cannot be dispossessed, a new power, a new certainty of power, a new joy in power. It attains health. It begins to live in its natural atmosphere, to trust itself to the large free air of life, to feel the beating of a Divine pulse in the world's life. It has escaped from the fetid odours of life's sick-room, as it has escaped from the dull stupidity of life's sensual carouse. And that is salvation, that sense of the soul's security in unflinching resistance to the forces within and without which its own instinct has declared to be hostile to its true life.

So then the real security of life does not lie in cleverly evading its risks, but in courageously taking those risks which it always involves. And yet that is not a thing which can be done lightly. It needs an impulse which will be strong, constant, undeniable, an impulse which, while it is most truly of ourselves, is also greater than our ordinary self, as great, at least, as the best we would be. And that impulse is our faith in God, our faith that it is His power that is working in us both to will and to do what we are conscious of willing and doing ourselves. Life does not struggle onwards and upwards without that divinely inspired faith in the eternal worth of life. It is God's part in our salvation. It is by no act of magic that God leads the soul into a sense of its own security. He does not lull it into a false security apart from the natural risks of its own energy. He does not artificially or miraculously remove the dangers to which in its every action it is exposed. But He is in its very constitution. He is of that natural movement by which it

unceasingly aspires. He shares in that conflict with itself by which it continually grows out of itself into something greater. Our faith in Him is the faith that life is worth living well, the faith that we can so live it, but that in order to live it so we must take its risks manfully, the faith that cowardice alone can paralyse the soul's life, that courage alone can sustain its healthy energy. In this faith we shall attain the high security which is God's greatest gift, the only security which life can gain or which it ought to desire.

And yet we shall deceive ourselves if we imagine that we can ever reach an undisturbed security. For that would mean that we had ceased to strive, that there were no more dangers to meet, that life had ceased to be the life we know—the life which must always take new risks because if it would grow it must always aim at higher things. And so it was that that great master of the spiritual life, St. Paul, who forgot the things that were behind and stretched forward to the things that were before, ever pressing onwards towards the goal to which he was drawn by the calling of God from above, could urge upon his disciples, with such anxious earnestness, the necessity of working out their salvation with fear and trembling. The soul of man is not healthy, it is not seeking health, if there does not brood over all its energy a great awe. How could it be otherwise? It is a trust from God which has been committed to us. He has proclaimed His eternal faith in us by making us what we are. He has planted His supernature in the very midst of our nature. He has called us to be that supernatural seed growing out of the natural soil, seeking its nourishment in the very veins of the natural, facing all the risks and

accidents of natural growth, turning every natural power and opportunity to account that it may grow the more surely to the full stature of God's supernature. Only so can we gain the soul's security at all. But it will still be a security rooted in awe, the security of a life still in growth, the security of faith and courage, not the security of ultimate attainment. The gifts of God are the gifts which life may have and use, not the gifts which supersede life and make it unnecessary. And if we have thought of salvation as a Divine-gift which dispenses the soul from the risks of living, we have done our best to destroy its reality, and even to prevent its possibility, in ourselves.

XX.—THE GROWTH OF TRUTH

“We know in part.”—1 Cor. xiii., 9.

All religion is a miracle, a miracle of transformation. It is a turning of water into wine. It takes the colourless, tasteless, frigid element of life and transforms it into life's fervent wine with its definite colour, its distinctive taste, its generous quality. Yet it is very often exactly the opposite process that we associate with the function of religion. We watch with confusion and dismay the manifold expression of life. We see honest minds arriving at contradictory conclusions on the plainest issues. We see men of noble and generous sympathies attempting to give effect to the same emotions in ways that clash and sometimes even neutralise one another. We shrink instinctively from this repellent and meaningless confusion of opinion and action. We demand of religion as of the highest thing we know that it at least should give us deliverance from this nightmare of private judgment. We reject the heady wine of opinion distilled in the alembic of human passion and prejudice. We want instead some clear unadulterated truth, free from the slightest admixture of any foreign element. The miracle we ask for is the miracle, not of Cana, but of Horeb. We can be content with nothing less than the water struck from the rock of Divine reality by the magical rod of some infallible book or infallible church.

Let us reflect for a moment upon the nature of such

a claim. We want the perfect and undiluted truth as it is in the mind of God. We want it for the nourishment and refreshment of our faint and hungry souls. We want to be sure that what we believe about life and the way of accomplishing its true destiny has come to us from God without any deviation due to the nature of the medium through which it has been sent. Well, neither the claim itself nor the belief that it has been honoured is of yesterday. The world is covered with religious societies founded upon this belief. And their very existence is its confutation. The truth which each of them believes to be an unchanging and infallible word of God is not only different from the truth of which all the others believe the same, but so different that each of them has been unable to recognise in the truth proclaimed by any of the others anything but a lie to be visited with anathema and execration.

But that is not all. It is perhaps the most obvious difficulty in the way of accepting this theory of the nature of religious truth, but it is by no means the gravest. For even in any one of the societies founded upon an unhesitating certainty that God's truth had been revealed to it alone, that truth has never remained for long the same. Either its form has changed, or the form has remained the same and yet even the authoritative meaning attached to the permanent form has changed. But even that is not all. For this process of change, whether in the form or in the interpretation of truth, has always been most in evidence when religious feeling has been intensest. Then the formal mould of the traditional revelation has been either rent and shattered by the variety of religious beliefs or has been

twisted out of shape by their mere force and vehemence. It is only when religion is dead or paralysed that it preserves intact the tradition it has received.

All this is plain matter of fact written large over the whole face of the history of religion. And the reason of it is obvious enough. God's truth was not sent into the world to be preserved in the theological archives of some favoured religious society, specially appointed as its depository and guardian. It was sent into the world to become your truth, my truth, to become a common spirit of life in all who would translate it into living power, to form its own society out of the lives which thus accepted and individualised its influence. It came into the world as the spirit of life, seeking only to create life, and so it exposed itself to all the risks of life.

But I know that there is a spirit abroad to-day, and not only in religious circles, though there perhaps most conspicuously, which distrusts all this way of looking at things, which condemns it as leading inevitably to anarchy in opinion and practice. In the world of secular thought it is frankly a spirit of pessimism and despair. Men say, "We desire freedom, but it has proved itself impossible. Leave men to themselves, and they will develop an insane and destructive individualism. The crowd must be curbed by an authority which it will recognise and respect, and it respects only what it fears." And religion, though it does not use this language, is evidently infected by the same despairing belief. Its despair indeed is more intimate and sincere, for it is a despair about ourselves. It says, in effect: "We cannot, we must not, trust ourselves to handle God's truth, we have seen the evil results of that in the past. We

have seen Protestantism broken up into innumerable sects, a great religious movement dissolving amid the ridicule of intelligent men into fantastic controversies over unimportant and often unreal matters of theological speculation. We must at all hazards save religion from the danger of lapsing into such a grotesque futility. We must mobilise religious society on the basis of instinctive obedience and submission to the unchangeable religious watchword." This is the pessimistic temper which for almost half a century has been increasingly dictating the method of life both in the secular and in the religious world. Government has become the one instrument of life, authority its supreme watchword. Society has been made a fetish, and its official utterance has acquired the dignity of a veritable word of God.

Now this seems to me to be as near practical atheism as any form of religious belief can be. It is at least a very anæmic expression of faith. And assuredly men would not have taken refuge in it had it not been for that despair of which I have spoken, the despair of trusting ourselves with the free use of life. Life is a personal venture, and in the highest things we have become afraid to take it. We are afraid, for instance, that if we seek for truth we shall miss it altogether. We fear that by venturing into the unknown we shall lose touch with the truth which the past has tried and found worthy and sufficient. Now, is there any justification for such a fear? It is of course true that there may be adventure for the mere sake of adventure, that men may indulge in a kind of spiritual or intellectual profligacy, that they may have claimed their inheritance of the spirit only

that they may waste it in riotous speculation, that they may be guilty of that kind of mental frivolity which delights either to tell or to hear some new thing. But the serious pursuit of truth is always rooted in the tradition of the past. We could not feel the desire of the further truth after which we are dimly groping if we had not already felt a real veneration for the truth which has hitherto nourished us. The most aspiring souls are always the most reverent. It is the life which branches out most variously and daringly that will also be found to have struck its roots most deeply and tenaciously. And it is only such lives that honour the tradition out of which they have grown. They do not think to honour it by keeping it, as it were, in a glass case, and priding themselves upon its possession. They honour it by using it, by turning it to practical account in their own poor blundering imperfect fashion. It is only thus that we can preserve the wisdom of the past. We save it by spending it, we preserve it by applying the lessons we have been able to learn from it in new circumstances and so letting it grow into something else. So long as we think of truth as existing in some pure abstract form, independent of the life of things, independent of our own nature and of the conditions under which our nature exists, we cannot be true to it. So long as we hope to find it as we find the diamond or the nugget of pure metal, we shall not find it at all.

God has planted His truth in the nature of things, in our own nature as its vital principle, as the spirit of all right action, as the need in us which seeks and finds our true satisfaction. Every expression of this spirit, every satisfaction of this need, is a contribution to the sum of

truth. God is for ever crushing the wine of His truth out of the grapes which cluster upon the vine of life, which have been ripened by the passionate earnestness of men's souls and by the generous warmth of real convictions. It is passion that makes such truth as we can have. It is the faith that makes the venture towards a further right that also admits us gradually and increasingly into the secrets of God's purpose. God's truth is ever before us, never behind us. Or rather it is neither before nor behind us, but within. What has yet to be declared will be declared one day only because it is even now taking shape in the rich purpose of human life. What has been declared in the past can only continue to exist in so far as it has been absorbed into human life as the spirit of its present energy. The water struck out of the rock of hard indubitable fact is always being turned into the wine which maketh glad the heart, and generous the purpose, and victorious the will, of man.

But we are still haunted by doubt when we reflect upon the confusion of ideals, the conflict of certainties, which mark man's progress. Well, let us question our own hearts and learn whether we would have chosen to have had a formal truth imposed upon us from the beginning to which we could only submit dry hearts and nerveless wills, or instead to feel God's unfailing guidance in the generous warmth of hearts that could not help but feel, in the tension of wills whose very need is spontaneous individual action. Our hearts feel, our wills act, only because the truth is to be sought. If it had already been found, they would be but part of the machinery of a meaningless world. The world means something to us only because its perfect meaning is always to be found,

because its partial meanings are always being found. God does not drive us with the goad of a truth which has been already given. He leads us towards the goal of a truth which has to be attained. And the truth which He has already given, He has given that we might absorb it into our nature as the living power which enables us to follow Him.

Religion is at a new and critical moment of its long history. What seems to many its eclipse is in fact the dull light which is preparing a new dawn. It is coming to realise that the truth which it witnesses to does not exist anywhere in the world ready-made, but that it exists wherever there is sincerity and earnestness of purpose wrought by human wills into the web of life. And the Christian world is coming to realise that this spirit was concentrated in its perfection in the life out of which it has grown, that the Spirit of Christ was the perfect expression of this trust in life as the theatre of God's manifestation and of action in accordance with it, and that therefore it was the spirit which could and would lead men into all truth. It is only through life responsive to His Spirit that we can be led gradually and increasingly into the highest truth. We know in part in order that we may know increasingly, *i.e.*, in order that we may know *truly* at all.

XXI.—THE NATURE OF CONSCIENCE

“All things that are reprov'd are made manifest by the light.”
—EPHESIANS V., 13.

There are certain principles regulating the whole economy of life which are so obvious that we seldom take account of them consciously. It is just the most obvious things that we often do not see. It is the most universal principles that we most frequently neglect or seek to evade. We always want to be cleverer than nature, searching out unusual ways to attain our ends though she has written large over the whole face of experience the surest means of doing so. The greatest of human discoveries are always the simplest. It is the glory of physical science that it has just been clever enough to see, that it has gradually released itself from the fatal cleverness of constructing an imaginary order of things, and the fatal delusion of trusting it. It has only revealed the indubitable process of nature, and in doing that it has created the greatest and most fruitful instrument of life.

It is so also in the spiritual sphere. The greatest wisdom lies in simply seeing the truth of things. But to see is not easy. The longer we look lazily at things the less we see of them. In proportion as the surface appearance of things becomes familiar, their reality tends to escape us. We want the goad of some fresh and living curiosity, the urgency of some imperious need, to

enable us to see things as they are. Necessity is the mother of discovery, and therefore but the grandmother of invention. Proverbial wisdom has omitted a link in the genealogical chain. It is true of course that some people see easily, that they never grow to be deceived by the inveteracy of their own habits, that the stream of their life flows from a native fountain of curiosity which never runs dry towards the eternal sea of truth. They are the great saints, seers, teachers, poets. But for most of us it is hard to see, and it is the one thing needful that we should be at least trying to see. There is a phrase of the mystics which it is well worth recalling and thinking over. They are accustomed to speak of the inner light, of a light which was no mere accidental quality of things nor even an atmosphere in which things were invariably seen, but an inner radiance which we must bring to the contemplation of things. That is the light by which we see the truth. It is something inward, of ourselves, the most essential element of our life. It is what we have called by a word which its general currency has debased, the word conscience.

Now let us think for a moment of the nature and of the necessity of this inner light, of the human conscience. We are accustomed to speak of it, and I suppose therefore to think of it, as a kind of moral register with which our nature has been provided, a kind of moral machine always indeed adjusted to our nature to perform a certain function in it, but alien to, or at the least independent of, its system and its action. The machinery of our nature clanks and labours, driven by the various motive forces within and the various attractions or repulsions of the world without which set those forces in motion.

And then this moral register, nicely adjusted to the system which is at work, appraises the value of each movement, passes an accurate and infallible judgment on each thought and deed. The moral indicator points the direction of right energy and of wrong. At any rate it is something in our nature rather than of it, inserted in it rather than growing with it and by it. By its aid we know what is right even though we do it not.

Now it is this mechanical image of conscience and of its connection with our nature which has made some of us weary of the very name of the thing. We never hear the word mentioned but we think of something unreal, elusive, contradictory of the plainest lessons of fact. And yet conscience is the most real and the most universal expression of our nature in its highest working. And just because it is its most real expression, it is also the expression which varies the most in each of us, which depends for its existence and character upon the kind or the degree of growth which happens to be ours. At its best it reveals itself as complete truthfulness with ourselves. It becomes the determination to let no prejudice, no avoidable ignorance, no deeply rooted habit of thought or feeling, stand in the way of a right judgment. Through all its fitful degrees of authority it is that determination in its various stages of power. At its worst it is the confused sense that that kind of judgment is necessary, that it alone is worthy of a true humanity. We want to see, and so we try to see aright, and get to see aright more and more. The immediate approving or disapproving faculty of Butler is largely an illusion because he seems to speak of it as a power which is naturally constant in its quantity and unvarying in its quality,

whereas it is in truth rather the need and the movement of our whole nature towards the acquisition of a power which is not yet ours. It is true that in the most confused and elementary activity of the simplest nature, there is an element of approval and disapproval, an element which guides and controls the activity. But its guidance has no absolute value. It shares all the weakness and uncertainty of the nature which it has concentrated in that momentary act of self-judgment. It guides, not along a path of assured right, but often by winding and devious ways towards a goal of assured right which will never be safely reached here. It is the principle of moral growth, and it grows itself with the growing nature which it forces to be truthful with itself. In short, conscience is not conscience except it is growing, except it is the pause of self-judgment of a human soul which starts it again refreshed and eager on its spiritual journey. Our nature can only approve or disapprove itself in the very act of its growth, and that particular aspect of growth is conscience. That aspect will be charged with all the imperfection of our nature at that moment. It will serve just to reprove what we are in the light of the next higher thing we can be.

But think of what we mean sometimes when we talk of obeying our conscience. We mean submitting to the dictates of the accumulated prejudice and ignorance which may happen to constitute us as to an absolute and infallible guide. We have turned the momentary into the eternal, and it takes its ironical revenge upon us by approving what it ought to reprove. Conscience is never real except it is growing, except its judgments are becoming more exacting and trenchant, except it

reproves in order that it may lead us to something higher. It is the growing inner light leading us out of the lessening darkness of ourselves, and yet adjudging every stage of further light which we reach to be darkness once more by reason of the still larger light towards which it is drawn. It is the something in us which will never let us be what at any moment we are, but will ever urge us on towards what we can be.

And it is because there is in us this growing inner light, this desire of increasing sincerity with ourselves, that we cannot rest satisfied with what at any moment we know of the world without us. There, too, we must advance towards the real in order to secure increasingly the real within. We cannot sweep prejudices out of the brain like so many cobwebs. It is a spiritual act. It is only sincerity within that can reach reality without. It is only vital touch with the reality without that will preserve the sincerity within. The reason of our stunted spiritual growth is the laziness of soul that refuses the great venture of search for fuller truth. And by fuller truth I mean nothing more than the reality of the ordinary facts with which we have to deal. We are called upon every day to judge of facts, often to judge of them in a way which must affect their future trend and growth. It is an appalling responsibility, and yet how lightly we take it. We pass our judgments lightly in the spirit of some inherited or acquired prejudice. We dignify this mass of confused opinion with the sacred name of principles, and think that we have thereby given a corresponding authority and sacredness to the judgment which they have inspired. But we forget that principles are only a convenient form for the lessons

which our experience or other people's experience of facts has already taught us, and that as facts grow under our hands our principles must be continually modified in order to deal with them aright. This appeal to fact, this insistent claim of fact to be attended to, is one of the surest and most fruitful ways of God's education of the soul.

Think of the eternal method of our moral growth. There is a world of facts lying before us to be dealt with. They are living facts, facts involving the interplay of human lives upon one another; facts determined by varieties of human emotion, opinion, purpose; in eternal conflict with one another, but in conflict only because they unconsciously desire a mutual understanding and co-operation towards an end of good for all. These facts must be understood, they must be caught in something of their true reality, or the human spirit will founder in the stormy seas of life. But they cannot be understood save by the aid of some general principles, of some standards of value which will enable us to sort them, to distinguish among them, to determine what is important and what is trivial, what needs encouragement to future life and what needs rebuke and reproof. And yet again these principles are not fixed and unalterable. They grow themselves by the reaction upon them of the growing knowledge of fact. Or if some of them seem to be fixed and unalterable, it is only in the most general sense, and usually in a negative sense. They warn us, that is to say, definitely against the attempt to reapply a principle of conduct which has been condemned once and for all. It is just what we might expect that the most permanent code of moral law is also the most

elementary, that it contains nothing but a series of "Thou shalt nots." But the positive application of the most general principles remains, and will always remain, an adventure of the soul, a problem to be solved only by close touch with the facts to which the principles are to be applied. Principles enlarge and deepen as facts grow in variety and complexity.

And then again there is a third factor in the process. How do we distil principles out of the material of fact? How do we discover the scale of values among facts which gives us the key to a just handling of them? And again the answer is, by a kind of native instinct or tendency of the soul. And that instinct is not mechanical, that tendency is not uniform. It has to become more deliberate, assured, skilful. It has to grow, and it can only grow by zealously performing its function of extracting principles from facts, of making perfectly sure of the facts so that the true principles may disengage themselves from them the more easily. The whole process is one of growth. Growth is no mere incident of life, no mere accidental condition of it. It *is* life. There is no growth of human life which is not moral, which is not an ascent towards and into a fuller humanity. All else is stagnation, retrogression, decay. To refuse the call of the growing conscience, to loll and feast at the groaning tables of life in the shadowland of our own comfortable caves, is to deny life altogether. Follow the gleam, that is life's call. Follow it painfully, tenaciously, courageously, up the rugged and difficult slopes where the light grows about us in the chill unfamiliar air as we ascend towards the mountain-top where will break at last the full dawn of God.

And just one word as to some of the practical aspects of this conception of life as growth. Growth means above all things variety, and variety confuses and confounds us because we long so instinctively and so earnestly for unity. Well, but what if variety is God's way to the only unity which is worth anything to Him? What if He wants the unity of life—one spirit running through an infinite variety of form, not the uniformity of death, of that which is the denial and extinction of spirit. What if God Himself, the Infinite Spirit, has chosen to reveal some aspect of Himself in every form which belongs to the world of reality? Is there anything which we are being taught more clearly to-day? Variety of opinion and feeling on the deepest things, in religion itself, and in all the ideal interests of men, has declared itself freely almost for the first time in human history, at any rate on a large scale, in the very bosom of the family, that closest association of men and women in the bonds of sympathy and mutual understanding. Wife and husband, parents and children, brothers and sisters, those for whom supremely life is love, are divided to-day as they never were before in matters of religion and of belief in all the highest things of life. Do you think that that confusion is merely evil, that it is serving no purpose in God's education of us? I, at least, am far from thinking so. We hold each of us to that way of truth which seems clearest to us. We even think sometimes that ours is the only way. That is the reason we have embraced it at such cost of spiritual partings from those we love. And yet love, the great unifier, remains. It will lead us, it is already leading us, to see that these varieties are parts, aspects, of the one unity; that each

of them has the right to its own strength and reality, because it contributes to the everlasting unity which would be incomplete without it; that the mutual toleration of beliefs which aspire towards a final unity, which already share in the unity of spirit, is a divine thing; that the tolerance which comes of mere indifference to what others believe is a diabolical and inhuman thing. It is well that to-day we live in an atmosphere of free discussion, that we no longer seek to manipulate opinion by underground means, or at least that in so far as we do so we feel that we are being disloyal to the cause of truth, that we are learning to trust more and more to the clash of honest opinion in the open. The supreme counsel of our age is that which Comte put in his famous phrase, "Live in the broad day, live in the open." It is God's word spoken to us again in the language of our own time. It was spoken long ago in the accents of another day which after all are not different. "All things that are reprov'd are made manifest by the light. For that which doth make manifest is light."

XXII.—THE CLAIM OF THE WHOLE

"And above all these things, put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness.—COLOSSIANS iii., 14.

St. Paul has been exhorting the Colossian converts to the practice of a very exalted kind of virtue. Nor is it indeed the mere practice of virtues, however exalted, on which he insists. It is rather on the assured and abiding possession of them as the motive power of all action, as the customary vesture of the Spirit. "Put on therefore," he says, "bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long suffering : forbearing one another and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any ; even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye." It seems as if it were impossible to heighten the effect of this suggestion of what is desirable in character. And indeed when St. Paul makes the attempt to do so, we feel at first that he has failed, that he is forcing an artificial and merely verbal climax where the climax of fact has been already reached. We could quite well understand his urging once again under the inclusive term of love all that he has already and perhaps we think more powerfully urged under those various concrete aspects and attitudes of the loving Spirit. We need so much, we think, to be reminded of the concrete forms of duty, the concrete aspects of character. We escape so easily from inclusive and generalised appeals. What we need above all is to have them broken up and resolved

into their separate unescapable claims. We need it simply because our moral attention is naturally sluggish and needs to be stimulated by the immediate incidence of a concrete claim of duty. And we need it also because the high-sounding generality is apt to flatter our vanity and so to leave us the more exposed to a practical forgetfulness of all that is involved in it. And so we feel that even if St. Paul had urged "Put on charity" simply by way of generalising all that he had urged before, the climax might have been more rhetorically effective, but was certainly less practically so.

But then St. Paul is not repeating himself at all. That "above all things" proves it. He evidently feels that he has reached a real climax in thought, and we cannot follow him. There is something essentially disconcerting in this assurance of a necessary and fortifying addition where we find only a gratuitous and somewhat weak repetition.

We shall all feel, I think, that it is worth while to try to discover why St. Paul used that "above all things," why he thought that in insisting upon the need of charity as a vesture of the soul he was really going beyond all that he had already urged. And if we are to make the attempt, we can only do so by taking account of the main lines of his thought as it is disclosed to us in these later epistles of his. And first of all, let us remember that St. Paul, in common with all great religious teachers, looks upon what we call virtue from two different points of view. He sees it on the one hand as an ideal and completed gift, and on the other as an actual growth. On the one hand it is the immediate gift of the Spirit. Rather, it is the Spirit at work within us.

Wherever the voice of conscience makes itself heard in a man's inner life ; wherever in the secret places of a living soul the unbridgeable chasm begins to yawn between a higher and a lower, between a right and a wrong, which to the ordinary eye seem to melt imperceptibly into each other ; wherever the making of a decision and the giving effect to it take on something of eternal moment, there the religious soul recognises the active presence of a Divine Spirit. There is indeed no other sure and convincing mark of the Divine than that. And the Spirit is there in its ideal fulness if it is there at all. Wherever God works, His whole power is working. Such at least is the faith of the religious soul, and such was the faith of St. Paul. The Christian was for him the man who had received the Spirit of Christ, in whom that Spirit had wrought a work of destruction and of renewal, had abolished the old man and established the new man.

Yet that was only one side of the picture, the side that presented itself to the eye of faith contemplating the ineffable work of God. There was another side, the side which was subject to ordinary methods of observation, the side which an accurate psychology could register and describe. The new man had his growth also, his gradual enlargement of perception and faculty. In that new world into which he had been born, the world of an alert and active conscience, the world in which action and all that lay behind action assumed a character of eternal moment, there was a continual development of power. There especially power must develop, and develop so as not to lose any of its past gains. For its development was the unfolding, in and through practice, of a consistent and perfect spirit. Every stage of its progress

was a gain of firmer hold upon the spirit which possessed it, of ever surer possession of that spirit. In the growing life of the one spirit its practical fulness would disclose itself step by step, and each gain would reinforce and complete all that had preceded it. Mercy and kindness and humility and meekness and patience and tolerance would be but the gradual unfolding of that perfect flower of the spirit whose vital promise lay hid in the germ of the soul newly-born into the Spirit's fulness of life. And the full bloom of the flower which in its perfection held securely all the stages of its unfolding and yet transcended them all was love. It was in this vital way that love came to be the bond of perfectness. And yet our first thought was true. Love was implied in every stage of the soul's ascent. There it was proved and strengthened for the fuller life which awaited it. The soul could never grow into the fulness of love unless it grew out of some vigorous and aspiring germ of love.

But this was certainly not all that was present to St. Paul's mind, if, at least in this form, it was present to his mind at all, when he so vehemently uttered that "above all things." Perhaps we may light upon some traces of his thought if we remember that vision which haunted all his later years and dominated the theology of his later epistles, the vision of the Church. It is difficult indeed to be sure of what St. Paul meant by the Church. It is at least certain that he did not mean, what is too often meant by that term to-day, a society of men held together by the visible bond of external and semi-magical rites. That Church, which existed then as it exists now, was to St. Paul as it ought to be to us but the herald and instrument of the real Church. For him the real Church

was at least a kind of mystical unity. Throughout its whole circumference there beat but a single life. In it all individuality had been developed to a point where it lost consciousness of its separate needs and claims in a greater unity. The Church had but one life, the very spirit of Christ. No one could be a true member of it who could not say out of the sincerity of his experience, "It is no longer I that live, but Christ liveth in me." The Church was the society in which the accidental distinctions of humanity had been abolished, in which there could not be "Greek or Jew, circumcision or uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, bondman, freeman," and that just because "Christ was all and in all." This was not to St. Paul, as it is to us, a pious declaration contradicted by every fact of our experience and every conscious tendency of our actual lives. It was to him the literal truth of experience, and the truth on which he built his hope for the whole future of humanity, a future which for him we must remember would count only some few years or at most some paltry decades. To him the one fact in history was that the Spirit of Christ had been veritably outpoured upon little bodies of men in some of the great cities of the Empire. Those groups of men had lost hold upon all that was separate or separating in life. They had buried the old man with Christ. They were risen with Him into newness of life. And that new life was one: it was most truly His. They were the Church whose advent was preparing the end, the end which was speedily approaching when Christ would be all in all.

And now I think we may see how natural is the Apostle's "above all these things," how that injunction

to put on charity is the natural culmination of St. Paul's fervent direction of his brothers in the Church. He felt that there might still be some place left for the cherishing of a sickly individualism in the practice of those other virtues. They were indeed but the imperfect and partial expression of that charity which was the perfect manifestation of the Spirit of Christ, which was the bond of perfectness and the dissolvent of all things that separated. Nay more, they were the necessary stages by which that supreme and all-reconciling temper of the soul could alone be attained. Yet there lurked in them great dangers, if they should try to subsist by themselves, if they should escape for a moment from the inspiration of that common temper which gave them all alike whatever healthy life they might have. How easily kindness might become a lazy and essentially selfish sentimentality, and mercy a demoralising accentuation of our natural tendency to pity ourselves, and humility a weak and unnatural disparagement of self gradually undermining all our real power of service, and meekness a self-conscious pose of inverted pride, and patience a sluggish and cowardly submission to fate, the abandonment of that spirit of conflict which alone keeps us morally alive.

And is not the whole history of religion a justification of St. Paul's sureness of insight? It has always been in times of religious health and vigour that men have lost sight of their separate selves, that the life for which they lived lay hidden in some ideal or actual community, that the joy and the satisfaction of sacrifice have descended upon them. It matters little under what symbols they have pictured the cause or the system for which they

fought. Its watchword may have been Catholic unity or Protestant individuality. It is not the form of the cause which determines its value. It is the readiness of men to sacrifice themselves for it, to lose themselves in it. It is what St. Paul meant by the Spirit of Charity, the consecration of the single life as its crowning satisfaction and reward to the life of the whole. Every religious system has known its moment of religious vigour and again its moment of religious decay. It is vigorous while men can use it to find their satisfying life in the common life, when their hopes and fears stretch out instinctively beyond the limits of their own individuality, when they are sure with a certainty which they cannot and do not care to analyse that their own loss and gain are not to be measured by what happens within their own personal circumstances, when martyrdom is always possible to them as one of the most imperative claims of their life seeking its true but unknown fulfilment. It is decaying when men use it to deify themselves by pondering brain-sickly upon their petty religious moods, when they try in vain to find salvation or evade damnation within the confines of their own sickly and straitened souls, when they assail heaven with their terrified appeals for some magical deliverance from that sin which only the redemptive power of life itself can annul. For the redemptive action of God works through charity, through the communion of life, through the life of each as it pledges itself with increasing ardour to the life of the whole and looks in faith to the life of the whole for some ultimate satisfaction of the legitimate claims of its own individuality, expects to realise its own destiny in proportion as Christ is becoming all and in all. Perhaps

that is why St. Paul could urge with reason, "And above all these things put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness."

XXIII.—MAN'S NEED OF DIVINE JUDGMENT

"Let us now praise famous men and our fathers that begat us."—ECCLESIASTICUS xlv., 1.

"Then shall each man have his praise of God."—1 CORINTHIANS iv., 5.

Where is the ultimate judgment of human life? By what standard is its worth assessed? The answer to that question which men will give or which they will accept as satisfactory cannot but have its effect on life's character. It will be perhaps the most direct formative influence in its making. For little as perhaps we suspect it, judgment is the one permanent force in the making of us. Our characters reflect its kind and degree, and where it dwindles away to vanishing point character dwindles with it. Indeed if we wished to study the varying conditions which determine the growth of a soul, we should have only to trace the different standards of judgment which men actually feel in their ascending scale of values. Think for instance of the most elementary form of judgment, that which moulds the life of the child. It is the judgment first of all of the smallest group of persons, of the mother, the nurse, the father at most, perhaps of only a single person. And secondly it is a judgment which must express itself directly and in the most definite form possible. But there comes very early in the child's life a time when the judgment which it feels and responds to presses in from a much wider field. Conflicting standards challenge it, and by their

conflict produce that awkward and difficult moment in a child's development which needs such sympathetic and judicious handling. There is the judgment of its own equals, the school code of honour or even of mere etiquette, that fine tradition of the budding human soul which we ought all to regard with a high reverence, that earliest form, at once so delicate and so crude, of the judgment of public opinion. And to this judgment the child answers readily. Yet it feels instinctively that there is a conflict between this judgment and the graver judgment of its elders, and it suffers from that sense of conflict which we hardly realise. And the stronger the child's character is the more will it suffer; the more likely, too, is it to learn in time high secrets of strength through that suffering. It is at such a crisis of growth that the judgment of the elder, if it is wise, will cease to be direct, that it will learn to impress itself through indirections. And again there comes the stage of early adult life when the area of judgment has become wider still, when its incidence has assumed a sterner note, when its character has become more complicated. And throughout all this process the judgment without has been answered increasingly by a judgment within, and has gone to make and develop that judgment. So that at last the moment comes when the inner judgment ought to take the lead if judgment is still to progress in its work of making the soul. But the soul gains this autonomy, this power and need of self-judgment, only to discover that it must meet a higher judgment still, a mysterious judgment which it dimly feels but can never clearly define, a judgment which seems to reside in unfathomed depths of itself, or again seems to press in from

some range of life far beyond its customary ken. And this is the history of a soul's making, this its response to a judgment growing in richness of kind and intensity of degree.

I ask you to keep this fact in mind as we consider the question of the nature of that ultimate judgment which we call the judgment of God, or rather perhaps I ought to say the question of the nature of man's experience of judgment which has led him to formulate his belief in the judgment of God. For in our ordinary moods we think to do God honour by distinguishing altogether between His judgment of us and our judgment of one another. But I think we have seen that however far apart they may be, however immeasurably above all human judgment the judgment of God may be, yet the higher in some sense grows out of the lower in our own experience, the higher is but a further reach of our experience which we should never attain if we had not healthily responded to the pressure of the lower. And further we have thought of God's judgment as a kind of summing up of man's life according to some arbitrary or at any rate uniform standard in one final act of purely judicial decision. And so we have lost sight of its real character as a continuous pressure of the Divine character upon ours, only by responding to which can ours be truly formed.

Now let us take as guide to our thoughts upon the necessity of the Divine judgment to the making of a soul these two sayings which I have quoted, the backward look of the son of Sirach and the forward look of St. Paul. There is something in that invitation of the son of Sirach which appeals to all that is noblest and most generous in

us. "Let us praise famous men and our fathers that begat us." Our hearts revert in gratitude to the men who laboured for the right that we might be what we are, to the struggles in which they spent their lives that we might enter into a goodly heritage. This very week* we lift up our hearts, and where more fitly than here in this house of God, in remembrance of a man who added a spiritual lustre to the name of Englishman and did more than any other man of his time and party to convert a cause which tended to become and had in fact largely become the cause of a faction, and of a narrow and narrowing faction, into the undying cause of England and even of humanity. In Milton we can after three centuries hail the stern and loyal lover and servant of the freedom of the human spirit in all its range of life and activity. We can praise his memory without an afterthought, in spite of the relentlessly logical conception of religion which betrayed him into many a grave failure of charity and urged him as to an imperious act of duty to deliver many a cruel blow. And yet think of what this very instance witnesses to in our praise of famous men. Even after three hundred years, we are not all agreed on Milton's worth. As a poet, indeed, we may agree to recognise his transcendent claims, though that may be largely because we have ceased to read his poems. But over the man and the cause which was more fully incarnate in him than in almost any other man of his time we still quarrel. The old prejudices live on even in our reading of those distant pages of history. There are no doubt Englishmen to whom in their heart of hearts this

* This sermon was preached on the Sunday following the celebration of the Milton Tercentenary, 1908.

week's celebrations are an offence. The fathers that begat us have begotten us into different camps, pledged to the maintenance of some special tradition. Their memory is still a judgment of us, an inspiring judgment it may be, but a judgment which inspires us to a partial life, and which too often tends to fix us in that partial life as if it were the whole. And does not this instance admit us to something of the secret of all human judgment? It is always a judgment of man by and through the past. It is well indeed that we should praise the famous men that have gone before us. It is well that we should learn from them all that they can teach us. It is well that their high human endurance and courage should be near to inspire and sustain us. But let us remember, too, that there is a danger of taking them in all their limitation, in all that divided them most from the perfection of humanity, for our standard. There is the danger of making the past or some aspect of it our sufficient and satisfying standard of judgment. And this danger is not peculiar to that praise of famous men in which, so far as it is at all sincere, we so often merely declare our own instinctive prejudices and lazy preferences. It exists, too, in every form of human judgment over us, in our very acceptance of human judgment as sufficient. When a child's moral character is being formed by the constant formal warnings and directions of its parents' anxious care and still more by the example of the tone and temper inherent in its parents' attitude towards it, when the schoolboy yields to the school tradition embodied in the average character of the present boys, when the young man almost insensibly conforms to the standard of honour and taste which prevails in his set,

when men who have to do with larger and graver affairs answer to the unintermitting challenge of public opinion, they are all accepting a judgment of the past. It is something slowly and patiently wrung out of past experience, something on that very account most valuable and even necessary, which judges them and in judging makes them. We can all see how absolutely necessary to certain stages of human life, for instance to the life of the child, this judgment of the past is. We can see too how useful it may be in all stages of our growth. But there comes a time none the less when the judgment of the past does not suffice, when it ceases to make us, and fixes us instead in a hopeless spiritual sterility. We need to find the judgment that will now inspire us beyond what we are and beyond that average of special human types which all human judgments record. The praise of men has ceased wholly to satisfy, the blame of men wholly to reprove. The praise that will fully satisfy whispers its diffident and yet confident message from secret depths of ourselves, from depths in which a voice resides which is more truthful, more trustworthy, than our ordinary hesitant selves. And the blame that really reproves speaks too from those depths with its grave stern accent of almost impersonal severity. That is the beginning of man's sense of the mysterious judgment of God. There is his point of contact with the truth that makes him. And there too is the beginning of his knowledge of a Heart that infinitely understands him. Such knowledge is not to be lightly reached. Only the life of fully-developed conscience can ever reach it. For that life alone is the life of God in our souls. It is the life that makes us free, that sets us in a grand independence of

the past, of all that has been. It gave St. Paul the independence which inspired him with that curious assurance that the elect, that those who shared this life of spiritual freedom, should judge angels. It gave him the independence which enabled him to declare that every man should have praise of God exactly when God had brought to light the hidden things of darkness and had discovered the secrets of the heart. And yet this same life of freedom in the conscience which can look on for all its hope to the judgment of God is also the life which will return to the past with increased power to draw from it all its spiritual treasure. It will not be satisfied either with loose praise or with summary condemnation of the past. It will instead, in obedience to its own vital need and instinct, sift the past as the vital instinct of the seed sifts the elements of the soil in which it is buried. It will know how to take what it needs and to leave the unnecessary and the harmful. And as the life of freedom and self-judgment grows to its fulness, it will more and more gain the power of finding in all that has been the eternal element only, that which is permanently ministerial to the growing purposes of God.

This, then, is the secret of the soul's true growth, this life of conscience penetrated by reason, this life of reason working by and through an increasing moral freedom, this life of constant openness to the judgment of God as dispensing the only praise which can abidingly satisfy and the only blame which can fruitfully reprove. That judgment is no fantastical conceit of mystical hope or mystical terror. On the contrary, we can all grow into a real experience, even into a real need, of it: and yet we can only grow into it out of a high and independent use

of that judgment of the settled past which shapes our earlier years. For it too, that human judgment, as we call it, was the outcome of the stern and costing conflicts of conscience. It, too, was the best response men could make to the spiritually creative judgments of God. For that reason and in that measure we praise the fathers that begat us. And praising them we look on to the judgment of God both for them and for ourselves for the only just and satisfying appraisalment.

XXIV.—SINCERITY IN AFFECTION

“In all things I have kept myself from being burdensome unto you, and so will I keep myself. Wherefore? Because I love you not? God knoweth.”—2 CORINTHIANS, xi, 11.

These words are part of the most curious fragment of self-revelation that even St. Paul ever penned. The epistle for to-day* is another part of the same passionate outburst of disturbed and outraged feelings. It is difficult to reconstitute exactly the circumstances which occasioned this outburst. But the evidence of the fragment itself, the last four chapters of St. Paul's second letter to the Corinthian Church, is sufficient to reveal to us at least the general nature of the situation. St. Paul's influence at Corinth has been subtly undermined by a party in the Christian community of that city led by men pronouncedly hostile to the Apostle himself. His title to the Apostolic mission has been called in question or even openly discredited. He himself has been accused of an overbearing attitude towards the churches and of an unscrupulous use of the authority which he has quite unwarrantably arrogated to himself. Besides all that he has been represented as a coward with all the coward's bravado. In their presence he has been weak, demonstrably unequal to the measure of authority which he claimed. But in his letters he assumes a show of strength which the Corinthians must repel with the scorn which it deserves.

* Sexagesima Sunday.

This is the nature of the cabal word of which is brought to St. Paul at Ephesus. He at once sets out, so it would seem, for Corinth, that city for which and in which he had laboured so strenuously and which he still loved with all the strength and devotion of his great nature. His mission seems to have failed at least partially of its purpose, and on his return to Ephesus he writes a letter of stinging reproach and incisive irony and vigorous self-assertion all commingled, in the hope of bringing the rebellious community to its senses. The last four chapters of what we call the second epistle of the Corinthians are the only fragment we possess of that letter. They were afterwards incorporated with a later letter to the same Church represented by the first nine chapters of the present Epistle. That at least is the theory propounded by the most competent New Testament scholars of the construction of the second Corinthian Epistle as we have it. And if that theory is trustworthy, it would seem that St. Paul's bold move had achieved its object, as the supposed later letter contained in the first nine chapters breathes an air of restored peace and intelligence between the Apostle and the so lately rebellious community.

But whatever may be the merits of the theory, let us examine a little more closely the undoubted character of these four chapters. Our first impression is that of mere confused and turbulent feeling. A nature at war with itself is struggling to find effective utterance. Anger, disappointment, wounded feeling, desperate but unquenchable hope, all break at once through a wild chaotic rush of sentences. And over all there clamours continually the note of almost violent self-assertion,

The ring of that contemptuous accusation of weakness and folly still sounds in his ears. Its sting still frets and galls every sensitive nerve. That is our first impression, and it is to some extent at least a true one. For the strong nature is always most sensitive and suffers through its sensitiveness. Yet a further impression grows on us as we get accustomed to the whirlwind of rushing words and phrases. We realise that there is a sureness in the march of this apparently chaotic thought and feeling. Through all the stress of angry disappointment, through all the haughty and violent self-assertion, through all the stinging irony with which he recurs continually to that accusation of weakness and folly which had so deeply galled him (Ye suffer fools gladly, seeing that ye yourselves are so wise. I speak, of course, as the fool you say I am. I speak foolishly, and so on), through all this there burns the bright glow of a steady purpose. The Apostle has himself well in hand all the time. And yet it is by no means the deliberate self-control of a man who suppresses or conceals his feeling in order to deal the more effectively with a given emergency. It is the self-control of the man who can always afford to let himself act through his most superficial and obvious feelings, so entirely and habitually is he possessed by a purpose beyond him, so sure is he of his absolute disinterestedness. St. Paul is completely identified with his mission. He is one with it, or rather he is lost in it. That is the secret of his outburst. It is the truth committed to him, revealed in him, that has been outraged in his person. The old cry is still the assurance of his inmost experience, "Yet not I, but Christ liveth in me." It is on that account that he not only can but must assert himself.

No self-assertion was ever more impersonal, more impelled by the necessities of truth itself. And when the irony of that repeated "I speak as a fool" breaks across the exultant earnestness of his self-assertion, he is conscious of a little ripple of silent laughter in the depths of his soul. For the supreme irony of that confession is that it is true. His enemies, the enemies of the truth, have identified the Gospel with themselves. It is their wisdom that they have found in it, something to raise them above their fellowmen. But St. Paul has identified himself with the Gospel. He is merged in it, not it in him. And he knows how its wisdom has revealed indeed the folly of all that in him is merely individual, how he is nothing save in so far as he can raise himself or rather as he will let the Divine Spirit raise him to the height of its demands. And so it is that St. Paul can be the great lover, that his heart yearns towards his poor rebellious children even in the midst of their rebellion, that his love has admitted him to the secret of their real character and provided him with the instinct for dealing with it as it needs to be dealt with, that it knows when it must in its own interest refuse that for which love always longs, its own repayment in kind. "In all things I have kept myself from being burdensome to you and so will I keep myself. Wherefore? Because I love you not? God knoweth that I love you."

Let us turn aside from this great figure of St. Paul, from the trouble and yet the profound satisfaction of the strong, tender, sensitive, burning heart, and consider for a moment the spirit of the love that is worthy and enduring, the sacrifices it must make, the crosses it must endure, the satisfaction it can and must attain. And

first of all no love can be real which does not lift its object into a higher world than the world of mere prosaic commonsense judgments, that does not in some sort idealise its object. That is surely too universal an experience to need insisting on. But think what that means. It means that we never love anyone truly but we love in the same act of the heart something beyond him, something with which we unconsciously identify him. We love man for the sake of something which is more than what man is, which is at least all that man might be and may become. And it is that voluntary condescension of the ideal world to us, that instinctive ascent of ours into it, in every real human affection that makes love a great spiritual education. The bonds of family life, the bonds of every true and lasting friendship, depend for their strength on a sense of things eternal, on an impassioned need of absolute justice and courage and honour and sincerity. The Cavalier poet put it all in a word when he wrote :—

I could not love thee, dear, so much
Loved I not honour more.

And yet there is an idealisation which is weak and self-defeating. Our commerce with the ideal is the most fatal of delusions if we do not keep it in contact with the real. And affection ought above all things to be an intensified perception of the real. We ought to be able to see those we love, just because we love them, as they are. And we must love them, if our affection is to endure and to be a gain to them, for what they are, and yet love them in the very same act for what they are not and perhaps never will be. If love is not woven of

those two strands of the real and the ideal, it will never bear the strain which life puts upon it. For the very constitution of our lives demands of the lives that are nearest to us by sympathy and affection the maintenance of a certain spiritual distance. The human spirit needs as it were its certain cubic space of air to live at all. Between two souls the most closely-knit there is always a certain delicate, almost impalpable, but none the less real reserve which each is bound to respect. And that is the great sacrifice that affection has always to make in the interests of its own purity and strength. Yet how hard it is sometimes to make it! How the selfish instinct in us tends to violate that neutral territory! We are so anxious that those we care for and long to serve should be exactly what we want them to be. Indeed we are inclined to make our service depend upon that condition, to abandon all interest in those who cannot conform to our rigid standard. We are wounded to the quick because those we have laboured to teach and train strike out new lines for themselves, because our children have abandoned beliefs which are very dear to us and move in a world of interests and ideas with which we are wholly unfamiliar, to which therefore we feel an instinctive and unreasoned antagonism. Or again on the other hand, and perhaps it is more characteristic of our indolent age, we take these things lightly. Affection is too selfish to concern itself overmuch about such things, or to create unnecessarily troublesome conflicts of will and opinion. An easy-going tolerance, a superficial pleasantness of intercourse, will all too readily usurp the place of the affection that cares and suffers. We like to be popular, to be the centres of the widest possible circles

of admiration, and in our selfishness we are ready in order to be so to dilute the sincerity of our convictions and to reject altogether the costing responsibilities of every genuine affection. This attitude is of course infinitely more fatal to ourselves and to our capacities of affection than the other. It argues a laziness and slackness of spirit, an emptiness of soul, that are our condemnation. It means that we have abandoned the need of the ideal altogether in our friendships in order that we may selfishly grasp the pleasantness of their superficial reality. But we find instead that we have inevitably lost touch with all that is real in them, that we simply do not know and have lost all power to serve those we esteem our friends. The other attitude is at least more worthy than this. It would force the real up to the measure of the ideal as we see it. The aim is always arrogant and the method will always prove futile with any nature that has courage and self-respect. But at least the view of friendship and its duties to which it witnesses is not altogether unworthy.

Let us see then to what general truth these somewhat crude observations of our ordinary human experience—observation of a reality so delicate and infinitely various must always be crude and partial—lead us. They ought I think to suggest to us that our apprehension both of the ideal and of the real is always a growth, and that that growth depends upon both those elements working together through and in our affection. We never find, as we often delude ourselves into believing, the ideal ready-formed. We begin indeed with some ideal of our own, but it is narrow, personal, exclusive. It needs affection to widen it out, to make it at once flexible and strong. We must

learn to take account of real human beings, to see men for what they are in their individual weakness and strength, and only the heart can teach us that various lesson. And as we learn it, our sense of the ideal becomes more and more impersonal and universal, an ideal which embraces all the concrete variety of many different natures, which provides for the most worthy satisfaction of many different needs and capacities, which sees what is best for all and how it can be made best for each. Until our ideals have attained something of that quality, they lack power and effectiveness. And only affection, the living sympathetic touch with what is most real in our fellowmen, with what they are themselves, can give our ideals that quality. And when they have gained that quality they are not and they need not be afraid to assert themselves. For then they are sure that love is urging them on, that a real disinterested care for others is working in every claim they may make. They may, if need be, assert themselves even through a righteous anger, through an anger which is wholly on behalf of the right, on behalf of what our real heart-inspired knowledge of others has revealed to us as right for them. For such anger always works through love and for the sake of love. It is the redeeming wrath of the Lamb.

And again the real natures of other people are not disclosed to us all at once. We have to grow into a knowledge of them. And we shall never grow into that knowledge, though we know them, in the light sense in which we ordinarily use that phrase, all our lives, unless we love them. And we shall never come to love them really if we do not love them in and through something beyond them, if we love not honour more. It is thus

that love is a growth, a life-discipline beset by many a care and demanding many a sacrifice and attended by many a hardship and secret pain. It leads us step by step into a fuller and fuller knowledge of those souls with whom we live, into a finer stronger and more tender helpfulness, into the divine respect which can be wholly one with another soul and yet leave it its own essential freedom. We grow into the innermost secret of the real concrete soul ~~we~~ we love only when we never lose sight of the ideal behind it and within it.

And may ~~we~~ not bring it all to a higher truth still? We can never love God or even know God, the Infinite Goodness, save through love of our fellowmen. We can never really love or even know men but through the love of a Perfection which fills the eternities.